

Chapter 5

Michamanades woke with a start. He flew straight up toward the ceiling in his cell and scurried into a corner and became invisible. The room was completely dark. He could hear liquid dripping down from the vent in the ceiling. He would not fall for that again. He wondered how long he had been unconscious, and was surprised not to feel the minds of the Predaxians pushing in on him. Perhaps Warden Kogala had been truthful when he said there was no poison, only something to help him sleep. He did feel remarkably well rested. Michamanades tried to sense outside his cell, but could not sense anything but the walls and vent. As his mind cleared from the effects of the sedative, he began to sense other living creatures in the room with him. He thought a moment about the risk of exposing his position, but knew it was better to know who was there than to hide forever. He glowed bright blue and could see he was not in the same place as before. There was no door in this cell, only an armored vent on the ceiling and a small drain on the floor near a puddle that had formed from the dripping liquid from the vent. The room was also twice the size of the previous cell. He noticed movement and saw two human bodies on the floor in the opposite corner.

He flew to the humans who were unconscious. He immediately recognized them as Captain Lauren London and Commander Wally Washington. He touched them with his tendrils and sensed their minds were not controlled by any Predaxians. Both had been severely beaten. Michamanades tried to heal their wounds with his mind. He could feel their bodies respond. “Lauren, can you hear me?” he thought to the Captain. She did not respond. “Lauren!” his mind screamed to her, but she remained unconscious and he could not reach her.

“Don’t waste your time, little friend,” said a voice from across the room. Michamanades flew up to the ceiling and disappeared. “Cute trick pal, but your magic doesn’t matter here.” Out of the dark corner of the room, a single Predaxian maklan walked toward

the center of the room. "I'm no threat to you pal," the Predaxian said, "I'm just as much a prisoner as you, except you and your friends have been here a few hours, and I have been here ten solar cycles."

Michamanades felt no threat from the creature and its mind was not reaching out for control. He flew down from the ceiling and landed a few feet in front of the other, blocking his path to the humans. "Okay, let's say that's true for a moment," Michamanades thought to the Predaxian. "Who are you and how do we get out of this place?"

"Well, I can't help you with your second question since I've been here a long time and obviously haven't found a way out yet. The first question is fair enough I suppose. I am Panoplez Zendo, the son of our great Emperor."

"Son!" Michamanades exclaimed. "You want me to believe the Emperor locked his own son up in prison? What did you do to deserve that fate, Panoplez?"

"Well, Mitch, it's a long story, but since we are all locked down here forever, I guess you have time to listen," he replied.

"How do you know the humans call me Mitch?" Michamanades demanded. "You are not a prisoner at all. What do you want from us?"

"When my father's soldiers jumped you three in, they told me. They told me that Lauren and Wally here had been very helpful in updating the Predaxian systems so we could communicate with the humans, Galliceans, Kalideans and maklans like you," Panoplez said. "You should know that many Predaxians don't really care for the Emperor, myself included. Those soldiers had to do their job, but like me, they'd like to depose my father and stop all of this intergalactic fighting. One of the guys is my cousin. Fortunately, I get to see him every few months when they jump supplies in here and check to see if I'm still alive."

"But we're still on Localus, right?" Mitch asked.

Panoplez laughed, "No way pal. My father doesn't trust those bird-brained Palians to watch over me. He is terrified I might use mind control to build my own army to depose him." He thought for

a moment. "He's probably right about that too. No, we are far from Palian space. This place is called Thuk. It is located in Predaxian space as far away from Greater Gallia as you can get. Nokalez Zendo doesn't want there to be any chance any of us can ever be found. I know why he feels that way about me, but I have no idea why you three are here. Predaxians have searched for other civilizations within a thousand light-years of this place and have found nothing. Thuk is a dead planet circling a white dwarf sun in the most lifeless portion of the galaxy."

"That's pretty depressing," Mitch replied.

"That's the truth pal. It gets worse. Thuk is a huge chunk of iron, probably ten thousand miles in diameter. My father had the military jump the biggest nuclear device they had into the core of Thuk and detonated it. That created an empty sphere one hundred miles in diameter. They installed equipment to provide air, water and some food, and then filled the rest of the void with the heaviest metals they could steal from other civilizations. Except, they left this one cell. My father built this entire complex for me. How generous of him, right?"

"That's awful, Panoplez," Mitch replied, truly saddened by this tale.

"It's okay Mitch. Call me Pan, it's simpler," he replied. "Hey pal, I think your friends are starting to wake up."

Michamanades rushed to the two people who had begun to stir. "Lauren, can you hear me, it's Mitch!" he thought. He could sense her mind was not under control from Panoplez Zendo.

Lauren London opened her eyes and saw Mitch next to her. "Mitch, are you okay?" she whispered as she attempted to sit upright.

"I think so Lauren," he replied. "We have been captured by the Predaxian maklans. Wally is here and he is coming around now too."

Lauren looked around the room. Her eyes grew wide when she saw the Predaxian ten feet in front of her. "Mitch, isn't that one of them right there?"

“Yes, but Pan is a prisoner too,” Mitch replied. “He represents those Predaxians who want an end to the tyranny and slavery, or at least that’s what he told me.”

“I hope you are right, Mitch,” she said. Lauren turned her attention to Pan. “Okay, Predaxian rebel, how do we get out of here?”

Once Wally and Lauren had recovered and ate some of the food that had been jumped into the cell with them, Panoplez Zendo recanted the story he had told to Michamanades. He told them he had been Crown Prince of Predax until his father sent him here. Fifteen years ago, he began to realize the Predaxian mind control activities were no longer for protection and had become weapons of tyranny. He had personally led invasions of planets where many thousands had died. The invading soldiers were controlled by Predaxians far from the field of battle. Many were from peaceful societies that had been turned into savages by their Predaxian controllers.

Pan told them how the Palians and Galliceans had been great allies many decades ago, before Palus was absorbed into the Predaxian Alliance. The mind control had been so thorough the Palians completely forgot their centuries of peace with Greater Gallia and became their mortal enemies. As a young man, Pan had led a Palian star cruiser into Gallician space during the First Predaxian War with Gallia fifty years ago. The battle in the space over Nok-lak-a was brutal with dozens of ships destroyed and dead bodies and broken equipment filling the skies. The ground battle between the Palians and Galliceans was exceptionally vicious. Pan had felt many soldiers under his control being killed and blown to pieces. He had been relieved when the retreat was finally ordered.

When he returned to Predax, he told his father he could not do that anymore and was given administrative functions on the home world. Pan excelled at managing government ministries and was given ever greater responsibility. Many senior bureaucrats were given governorships on Alliance planets, and Pan took over their roles on Predax. He enjoyed developing his staff and helping them fill the voids when large numbers were sent to the colonies.

As more planets came under Predaxian control, Pan found that more were returning home to get away from the fighting and mind control roles, as he had. Twenty years after the war with Greater Gallia, he started a foundation to help Predaxians who suffered from trauma after combat. Pan found many Predaxians were becoming disenchanted with expanding the Alliance and controlling more Beings who simply wanted to live their lives in peace. Pan was reminded why he came back to Predax and left the fighting to others. He had always been proud of his father, but was now beginning to see the old ways only brought dishonor to his planet. Predax had changed from being the target of other civilizations in the quadrant to a leech living off those once great cultures, forcing billions of Beings to do their bidding.

With his position as Crown Prince, Pan was able to secretly build a large network of Predaxians who wanted change. He hoped he would somehow be able to convince the Emperor to take a new course. Emperor Nokalez Zendo had become so thirsty for power he hatched a plan to invade Greater Gallia a second time. Alliance power had grown tremendously since the first war. His plan relied on Predaxian spies to infiltrate the highest levels of Gallican power and get their forces to move from the frontier. Once Nom-Kat-La was taken, it would open routes to hundreds of other Gallican planets in the quadrant. The strategic importance of that planet had been ignored during the first war when the generals made the decision to attack Nok-lak-a. That defeat was a wound that would never heal.

As weapons factories geared up for the next invasion, Panoplez went to his father to stop the madness. He pleaded to cancel the invasion and to give greater freedom to the other civilizations within the Alliance. He told his father the Beings under their control were virtual slaves being sent into a battle they did not agree with. Pan told him there were millions of Predaxians who agreed with him and wanted nothing more than peace. Pan remembered how calm his father had been that day. He smiled at his son and told him his spies had infiltrated Pan's foundation and his circle of friends. Thousands of Pan's followers were arrested

and sent to prison planets throughout Alliance space. The Emperor stripped Pan of his crown and authority and remanded him to Thuk to think about what he had done.