

Chapter 1

RESURRECTION

IN the silence and emptiness of space, a black scorpion-shaped battleship marked with a distinctive red scorpion insignia had just dropped from hyper-drive to cruising speed. A thick-set long-haired and unkempt figure was making himself more comfortable in the Captain's Chair when suddenly, his battleship was struck by a powerful force that reverberated through the ship's hull. He was jolted forward onto the console with his arms flailing, trying to buffer the impact. High pitched alarms screamed in the cabin and small coloured lights flashed wildly across the entire console. Dazed by the impact and with his eyes still trying to refocus, he struggled to regain composure. Coming to his senses, the figure sprang into action.

Reaching for the controls, he checked for signs of damage and scanned the monitors displaying the craft's perimeter. There was nothing to indicate the cause of impact — no asteroids, no space junk and no enemy ships.

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Not taking any chances, especially in this treacherous, uncharted solar system, he immediately shouted commands, "Computer, raise shields to one hundred percent and arm laser cannons! Assess damage and turn off those #\$!?* alarms!" Instantly the screeching noise ceased and the flashing lights dissipated.

Within minutes a monotone simulated voice came over the

Comms, "Damage Report: All systems operational. Minor damage to hull. Cause of assault: Unidentified missile."

The lone pilot realised he was under attack. But before he could take evasive action, the Comms unexpectedly crackled

and came to life again, this time with an unfamiliar raucous voice speaking in the pilot's native tongue, Trelarian.

"Attention, space voyager! We've fired a warning shot.

You're about to enter a Trelarian zone. Identify yourself!"

The anxious intruder switched on his main screen and was

shocked to see a massive, intimidating warship fast approaching and beginning to dwarf his vessel.

"Where the #!?!* did

that come from?" he blurted. "Computer, magnify tenfold!"

The screen flickered to reveal a close-up of a heavily-armed

black warship, unlike any he had seen before. Yet, it was bearing the unmistakable Trelarian insignia of a deadly-looking

red scorpion.

The intruder knew he was out-gunned and, most assuredly,

out-powered. Alone, he was at the mercy of these unfamiliar

Trelarians. However, he had no intention of running. This

must be the remote Trelarian army for which he'd been searching. The

challenge now was to befriend them before being decimated.

Before he had time to respond, another more threatening demand came over his Comms, "Space voyager! Respond

immediately! If you continue on your path, you'll be destroyed

by the minefield you're fast approaching. If you try to escape,

you'll be fired upon!"

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Immediately, he brought his battleship to a standstill

and the screen flickered to reveal a larger-than-life image

of his attacker. Before him was a mean-looking, solidly-built

Trelarian with a trimmed black beard, dark sunken eyes and

the leathery face of a seasoned soldier. The slick Trelarian

captain was dressed in a black uniform with blood-red epaulettes and matching sleeve cuffs. His jet-black shoulder-length

hair was pulled back neatly into a ponytail over a high buttoned

collar and embedded on the helix of his right ear were three small gold studs. His face was stony and he glared intently at the intruder.

The lone pilot was not intimidated. "Hold your fire!" he screamed defiantly. "I'm First Lieutenant Ramlok, emissary for General Dranz, leader of the Trelarian Fifth Legion from the Northern Quadrant. I come alone and in peace on urgent business. I need to speak with your General!"

On-board the threatening warship, the Trelarian Captain tensed and leaned forward in his chair. He was impressed by the stranger's defiance and curious to see the image of this audacious intruder which now flickered onto his screen.

Facing him was a thick-set, dishevelled rebel whose face was marked with battle scars, his dark wild eyes staring with a haunting intensity. His straggly hair was greasy long and matted and his beard ungroomed. He was wearing a well-worn,

brown-leather battle-jacket over a crumpled blood-red shirt with a wide dull-yellow sash pulled diagonally across his broad chest. The Blader insignia of crossed daggers was emblazoned prominently on his battle-jacket.

Recognising the guerrilla freedom fighter's outfit from descriptions in the annals, the Captain addressed his captive with confident authority. "I'm Captain Tarken, commander of this warship. Our weapons are targeted on you. Give me proof of your identity!"

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Ramlok's stone face gave no hint of fear, though he well knew Trelarians were inclined to shoot first and ask questions

later. He reached carefully for his dispatch papers, slowly unravelling a dark leather pouch before holding the enclosed parchment up to the screen so it was clearly visible to the Captain.

Ramlok watched Tarken's eye movements on the screen as

he scrutinized the hand-written words and inspected General Dranz's signature sealed with an imprinted red-waxcrest. After a tense moment, Captain Tarken raised his head and made direct eye contact with the rebel Blader as if searching for the truth. Finally, he spoke again with the same tone of control, "Very well Lieutenant Ramlok, the document appears authentic and our heat sensors indicate there are no other life forms aboard your ship. I'll escort you to my General on Planet Orkharn."

Ramlok breathed a discreet sigh of relief. "Thank you Captain. I'll follow your lead," he said with outward bravado. "Be warned, stranger, we'll be monitoring your every move!" threatened Tarken, glaring at Ramlok through his dark eyes. "You need to follow my route closely to avoid our space mines. Hold your course Lieutenant Ramlok or you're dead!"

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"Comms, fire up the craft and follow that warship!" Ramlok instructed, thinking so far, so good ...

As he trailed his new-found escort vessel, Ramlok reflected on the events that had brought him to this dangerous solar system and to his encounter with the assertive Captain Tarken. On the orders of General Dranz, he had come on an urgent mission to find the long-lost Trelarian legions in the outer regions of the Eastern and Southern Quadrants of the Universe. He was carrying a message for General Khuram Vark

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of the Second Legion, and General Jelzad Rokan of the Third Legion. And, hopefully, he was about to meet one of them. However, his mind was in conflict. These legions had deserted the Trelarian forces some five hundred years ago

during a protracted interplanetary war with the Tzuracians over precious Xytrinium resources. Realising they were losing the battle against the enemy Tzuracian Sentinels—who had superior qualities and an extended lifespan resulting from a secret process of infusing Xytrinium into their DNA—the Second and Third Legions had abandoned the fight and sought refuge in the far-flung outer regions of the Universe. The message from Dranz was requesting these deserters join forces with him once again in an all-out war to destroy their age-old arch-enemy the Tzuracians who had formed a Federation of Planets that now controlled most of the Xytrinium resources in the Universe.

Ramllok screwed his face up in disgust. Although he hated these Tzuracians with a vengeance, he was loath to side with traitors and he resented being sent begging on behalf of his General. He was a proud member of the defiant rogue Fifth Legion — a legion of Trelidarians who had refused to surrender to the Tzuracians in the Grekadian Wars and had established a life of piracy as ‘Bladers’ plundering Federation transport ships carrying precious Xytrinium. The Bladers had continued their rebellious life for centuries.

Ramllok harboured a deep-seated animosity towards the Second and Third Legions who had deserted their brothers-in-arms in times past and he was sceptical they would now rally to support Dranz. But, if the Tzuracians and their Sentinel army were ever to be beaten, he had to put his pride and his prejudice aside. It was imperative that all those of Trelidarian heritage come together again as one massive army.

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Then, a devious smirk appeared on the Blader’s face — he knew he was carrying with him the secret which would persuade these traitors to rally to the cause.

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After travelling at high speed for several hours while navigating treacherous mine-fields, the two ships slowed to cruising

speed as they approached the outer orbit of Planet Orkharn.

Ramlok was astounded at what he saw before him — spectacular iridescent purple nebulae of swirling gases set against a

black space void, thickly sprinkled with tiny white spots of stars.

Descending through the coloured haze to the surface of

the pale grey planet, the rebel Blader could make out a thriving metropolis which stretched far and wide to the base of a

distant smoky-bluemountain range. Grey plumes of smoke

belched from a number of tall stacks scattered amongst the

congested buildings.

Ahead of the ships was a massive almost-spherical hangar.

It was constructed of thick heavy metal girders interlocked to

increase the structure's strength and stability, then overlaid

with giant hexagonal panels.

“Lieutenant Ramlok, prepare to dock!” Captain Tarken

demanded over the Comms. “Shut down your thrusters!”

As his ship entered the hangar, a traction beam locked

Ramlok's vessel in a fixed path towards the docking ramp leaving no margin for accidental collision or attempted sabotage.

Ramlok spied several cannon batteries and mounted cameras

positioned strategically around the walls of the giant hangar.

The reason for the strong fortification was obvious. The hangar

housed a large fleet of warships and battle cruisers coloured

black or various shades of dark grey for space camouflage. All

were silently resting like a pack of sleeping beasts in wait.

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After disembarking from his vessel, Ramlok was confronted

by ten armed Trelarian soldiers dressed in black uniforms. In

an instant the soldiers seized his weapons and, under duress,

Ramlok reluctantly handed over the leather dispatch binder.

He cursed the traitors under his breath.

One of the escort soldiers delivered the binder to Captain Tarken who was striding towards Ramlok's ship after disembarking from his own craft.

"Apologies for the abrupt greeting Lieutenant," said Tarken in a conciliatory tone, "you're an intruder to our sanctuary, and we don't take any chances. Follow me and I'll take you to General Vark's headquarters."

Ramlok acknowledged silently by nodding. He had made it to the Second Legion.

The Trelldarian escort remained cold and expressionless as they herded Ramlok to the General's headquarters. The entourage marched without a word through a maze of dimlylit, roughly-carvedstone passageways barely wide enough for three abreast. Diffused bluish-light emanated from large overhead panels, partially illuminating the grey stone walls and floor. The passageways were cold and sterile.

After marching for several minutes the Captain shouted "Halt!" and the guards came to a standstill outside an entrance sealed by two thick metal doors. The doors opened leading into a spacious well-lit and sparsely decorated room with a high ceiling. A collection of various weapons was mounted around the stone walls. There were large long-bladed swords with intricate metal-sculptured hilts, metal shields with patterned emblems emblazoned with strange animal features, bows of both longbow and crossbow construction, and spears of different lengths with fancy designed hunting heads, as well as other unfamiliar spiked and bladed weapons.

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An oversized wooden table, surrounded by several wooden framed chairs covered with shiny black material, stood in the centre of the floor. Seated on one of the chairs was a large imposing figure. His hair, tied back in the familiar Trelldarian style, was streaked with silver-grey. It matched the colours of his

moustache and medium-length well-groomed beard.

From a distance Ramlok could discern a thinly-grooved burgundy scar running vertically from the figure's forehead across

his right eye and halfway down his cheek. An old war wound, thought Ramlok. Four gold studs were embedded into the outer ridge of his right ear and like Captain Tarken, the figure was dressed in a black uniform with the blood-red trimmings of an officer. He was also decorated with a gold-braid twine looped around his sleeve at the shoulder and a gold medallion pinned to the left breast of his high-collared jacket. Impressive!

As the escort arrived, the General rose from his chair.

While gesturing with his right arm he spoke in a sharp guttural tongue, "Bring the visitor to my table, Captain!"

"Yes Sir," responded Tarken with a half-raised arm salute, ushering his captive forward. "Sir, this is Lieutenant Ramlok, emissary from General Dranz of the Fifth Legion, Northern Quadrant."

Tarken turned to face Ramlok. "Lieutenant, this is General Vark, Supreme Leader of the Second Legion."

The introductions complete, Tarken handed the leather binder to the General, as Ramlok watched closely.

"Be seated, Lieutenant," said the General, in what was more of a stern request than an order. "And stand easy, Captain!" he commanded his subordinate, who was clearly a disciplined officer.

Ramlok slid a chair out from the table watching this hardened formidable pair and, as he sat down, the General seated

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himself directly opposite. Tarken stood behind his General, and both carefully scrutinised their unexpected and unkempt guest with the wild-looking dark eyes.

“Like some wine after your long journey, Lieutenant?” Vark asked, waving his arm in the direction of a carafe and four metal goblets which had been placed on the table. As he did, Ramlok noted that the scar had caused a partial paralysis on the right side of Vark’s face, giving him a villainous crooked smile.

“Yes, just what I need,” said Ramlok feeling more at ease.

“Captain, pour a drink for our visitor and one for me as well. It’s a special occasion meeting our brother from the past.” He paused for a moment. “It must be a desperate situation for General Dranz to send you all this way after all these years,” he said as he began to open the dispatches.

Ramlok sat silently watching the General stroke his beard carefully with his right hand while thoughtfully studying the dispatch in detail. The General’s facial expressions mirrored his emotions and his breathing became faster as he progressed through the pages.

When he had finished reading, General Vark leaned back in his chair and slowly raised his head. His furrowed brow indicated the gravity of General Dranz’s request and his cold steely eyes stared into the distance as he thought about the consequences. He reached across the table for his goblet and swilled a mouthful.

“Now let me see if I understand this request which has brought you to our far-flung region of the Universe ... General Dranz is desperate to destroy the Federation and its Sentinels of Tzurac and gain control of the Federation’s Xytrinium reserves. Nothing’s changed in five hundred years!” He chuckled under his breath and Tarken joined in.

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“And he’s acquired the formula which gives the Sentinels

their super-strength and longevity by infusing liquefied

Xytrinium into their DNA. He's used it to enhance his own

army of Bladers, including you I assume?" Vark raised the eyebrow over his scarred right eye. He was obviously surprised and

impressed with this remarkable news. Captain Tarken, standing with his mouth agape, was also astounded.

Ramlok nodded in the affirmative and swigged his goblet

of Trelarian wine in one gulp. "Yeah, and I have it with me,"

he said arrogantly. "I have the formula and equipment which

could transform your army into super-soldiers who could live

for centuries."

"You have it with you?" the General said with some scepticism. "After all these centuries you're telling me we have the

means of raising our powers to compete with the Sentinels on

their own terms?" Vark eyed Ramlok up and down, noting his

war-torn face and his dishevelled battle-jacket. "You don't look

like a super soldier, Lieutenant Ramlok," he taunted. "Why

don't you show us what you can do?"

Without a word, Ramlok clenched his empty metal goblet

and with a vice-like grip, squeezed it to a pulp with ease. He

then leaned forward and dropped the crumpled mass from

shoulder height onto the tabletop. It landed with a solid thud

and a resounding loud echo.

Vark and his Captain turned to each other clearly impressed.

"Not bad," said Vark, "you've got my attention... So if Dranz

had a super army, how come the attempted takeover of Terra

Major's Xytrinium reserves and their mines on Terra Iota was

foiled by the Sentinels of Tzurac? It says so in the dispatches."

"The Sentinels were expecting us," said Ramlok, raising

his voice and clenching his fist. "We were betrayed and walked

into an ambush." Vark could sense Ramlok's anger.

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“Hmm ... So now Dranz is determined to destroy the armies on Tzurac and Terra Major and he’s offering us the benefits of Xytrinium infusion if we agree to join his army.”

Tarken’s face instantly lit up. He was excited by the prospect.

Before Ramlok could respond, the General motioned to stop him from speaking. “Why would I want to involve my Second Legion in Dranz’s war when we have everything we need in this galaxy?” He looked doubtful.

“When my Legion arrived here during the Grekadian War, we conquered five planets which now supply us with all our needs, including Xytrinium from Planet Glantos. We’ve survived and prospered here, enslaving male captives to labour in

the mines and the fields and females to serve for our pleasure.

The Tzuracians have left us to our own devices in this isolated corner of the Universe. Yes, the promise of infusion is attractive Lieutenant Ramlok, but would it be enough for us to disrupt the empire we’ve built for ourselves?”

Vark pondered for a moment. “I’m not convinced,” he said, shaking his head dismissively.

Vark was not easily persuaded. He was a highly intelligent soldier with a sharp mind and he liked being in complete control. He was currently the Supreme Leader of his own empire

in the Eastern Quadrant. Although tempted by the thought of taking vengeance against the Sentinels and controlling all four

Quadrants of the Universe as well as the Xytrinium resources,

he wanted to be sure of success before relinquishing his current position of power.

Ramlok took care with his response. He had to keep his

resentment in check and avoid provoking the situation. He

reached across the table for a fresh goblet and poured himself another wine without invitation. Then he leant back in

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his chair and throwing a leg over one of the chair-arms, took another mouthful as he considered his reply.

“Speak freely Lieutenant,” said the General impatiently, pressuring Ramlok for more. “Captain, sit down and pour yourself a drink. This is getting interesting.”

“Thank you Sir,” Tarken said as he sat down obediently and joined the party.

“Well General,” said Ramlok, taking a deep breath, “your peace and tranquillity is now under threat.”

Vark and Captain Tarken exchanged sceptical glances.

“How so?” Tarken asked defiantly.

Ramlok almost choked with emotion as he answered. His mood had suddenly changed. “On my way here I intercepted a Sentinel transmission announcing that General Dranz and our army on Steiros had been captured by the Federation and executed.” Vark shook his head, almost in disbelief. “What in the Gods’ names! Dranz and his Bladers couldn’t fend off the Sentinels on Steiros? Some super-soldiers!”

Ramlok shrugged his shoulders. “Steiros was supposed to be our safe haven. I can only guess we were betrayed once again. Someone—and I have my suspicions—must have informed the Federation, and the Sentinels took my General and his soldiers by surprise.”

“So you continued your journey here to ask me to join an army which no longer exists?” Vark was perplexed.

“Yes,” Ramlok said boldly. “I came because I was following orders. I came because with your help I can avenge the death of my General and my comrades.” He paused for effect. “And I also came to warn you that you may now be in grave danger.”

“In danger? What have I to fear?” Vark asked, confidently

stroking his beard. "On the contrary Ramlok, you're the one in danger." He glared at Ramlok. "We could dispose of you right

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now and use the formula for ourselves." Tarken concurred with a shake of his head.

Ramlok didn't flinch. "You could General, but you'd be losing all my knowledge and experience. And I suspect you will need it ... soon! The Tzuracians have advanced techniques in mindprobing and it's highly likely they extracted information from

General Dranz before executing him. It wouldn't surprise me if they know he sent me here on a mission to gather more forces and that I carry with me their formula for infusion. If so, the Tzuracians will be keen to strike quickly to recover their secret formula and prevent the development of more super armies. They could even be on their way to Orkharn as we speak."

General Vark cursed under his breath as blood flushed his face in anger. He was livid. He sprang to his feet, sweeping the wine carafe from the table with a forceful blow, slamming his fist down and shouting at Ramlok.

"You idiot! You should not have come. You've jeopardised our sanctuary, trapping us into taking up arms against an elite force of Sentinels. I'll kill you for this!"

Vark reached for his blade, but before he could draw his weapon the seasoned veteran Captain Tarken placed a hand over the weapon's hilt to stop him. "Let's wait and see what he has to offer Sir, before we dispose of him," Tarken said firmly.

Although Vark respected the actions of his clear-thinking officer, the atmosphere in the room was tense.

"Shall I continue General?" asked Ramlok with a smug calmness. He sensed he had the upper hand.

“Yes Lieutenant, tell us more. Tell us everything!” said the General aggressively, removing his hand from his sword and reluctantly resuming his seat.

With Vark and Tarken gazing furiously at him, Ramlok casually took another swig of wine. “Although General Dranz

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and my comrades are dead, the Tzuracian Sentinels have other enemies who would seize any opportunity to defeat them.

“When we attacked Terra Iota we did so with the help of our allies, the Kyroni and Diunons. The Tzuracians have imprisoned the surviving leaders of both races and imposed martial law on their planets. You’d have the full support of these allies if you were to crush the Tzuracian overlords on their planets and release their leaders. They’d welcome the opportunity to take revenge. With these reinforcements you could increase your Eastern and Southern Legions’ armies to advance on Tzurac and Terra Major.”

The General and his Captain acknowledged the possibility somewhat reluctantly, tilting their heads to each other as

Ramlok continued.

“I also think you can destroy the shield or Dome which has protected the Tzuracian capital Khazor, since the Grekadian War. General Dranz had been working on a scheme to build Xytrinium warheads capable of penetrating the force-field. I have those plans. Together, your armies could take them by surprise and beat them at their own game.”

Ramlok sat back, confidently, and took another mouthful of wine, allowing time for the General to comment.

“Perhaps...” For a moment Vark seemed lost in thought.

“Clever... I can see why you were chosen by Dranz to be his emissary.”

"I was with my General for a long time," said Ramlok. "He was my mentor in battle tactics and war strategies, and a good one." Vark could sense the admiration. "Our attempt on Iota failed only because we were betrayed and our plans exposed to the Federation. This will not happen again!" Ramlok was now shaking with anger.

"I sense your anger and loss, Lieutenant. I also see you want your revenge. Anything else we should know?" asked Vark.

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Ramlok contained his anger and lowered his voice. "The Xytrinium deposits you have on Glantos won't last indefinitely. There are abundant stockpiles on Terra Major and more of this resource to be mined on Terra Iota. Unfortunately, Terra Major is now a member of the Federation of Planets and is under the protection of the Tzuracian Sentinels. We need to destroy the Federation so all the Xytrinium will be under Trelarian rule."

Ramlok knew General Vark and his Captain were becoming more interested. The Blader's words seemed to have

aroused their warring instincts: Deep-seated hatred towards the Tzuracian Sentinels, which had been buried for centuries, was beginning to resurface. As they drank from their goblets, Ramlok could almost hear the wheels in their minds turning over the prospect of the Trelarians becoming rulers of the four quadrants of the Universe.

General Vark broke the silence, clearing his throat and

speaking with authority. "Alright, Lieutenant, I'm not overjoyed at you bringing this proposal to me uninvited, but I'll

consider it. I'll summon my War Council."

In spite of the strained atmosphere and his long-standing resentment of these Trelarian deserters, Ramlok was starting

to feel some affinity with his brothers.

“Captain Tarken, escort the Lieutenant to his quarters and arrange a meal for him.” Vark turned to Ramlok. “Be ready

Ramlok when the War Council summons you in the morning. In the meantime, get some rest. That’ll be all for now,

Lieutenant. You’re dismissed.”

“Thanks for the wine, General,” Ramlok said as he rose from the table and left the room with Captain Tarken. His attempts to persuade the General had been successful. His next challenge would be convincing the War Council.