

Light of Ganymede
Book 1 of the
Glassígh of Ganymede Trilogy

1

Coeur d'Alene, 1956

Everything was going to change for Gladys—her home, her past, her future, even her time—but mostly her purpose. Though it all could be prevented and well enough left alone, he believed that it was his obligation to the world to bring about this change.

As he walked along the stone footpath beneath the evergreens, he could already hear the notes of a piano drifting through the night's cold winter air, breathing the opening of something familiar: "Ave Maria," Shubert's masterpiece. This also meant that the high school's evening Christmas concert had already begun, and he was late. He quickened his pace.

He realized he would miss this place, especially the snow and the sound it made as it fell through the cold air to glance off the fine needles of pine trees before settling onto the ground. He often walked at dusk in the winter when no other human echoes were heard. Any remaining sound was absorbed into nothingness by the existing white blanket, leaving only the gentle sigh of the falling crystals.

As he rounded the final bend in the path, he saw the high school ahead, lit by the few lampposts of Coeur d'Alene, their faint golden glow making muted circles on the snow. Some light escaped the several high, narrow windows of the school, promising comfort and warmth within.

Reaching the door, he opened it and removed his hat as he stepped into the vestibule. The warmth of the room rushed to him, caressing his face. He could now hear a voice join the piano. He was startled by its beauty as it drifted through the double doors that led to the gymnasium.

Could it be her? he asked himself. No, it couldn't be.

He opened the left door to the gymnasium ever-so-slowly. There was a pause in the singing, though the piano continued. Silently, he moved to a position where he could stand in the rear and look toward the stage. As his eyes fully adjusted to the darkness, he could make out the setting. The entire town of Coeur d'Alene was present. People packed the aisles. They sat shoulder-to-shoulder in bleachers and folding chairs

arranged tightly together on the gym floor. The audience faced a stage made of low wooden risers set on the far side of the room. The platform held the choir, though they were barely lit, mostly hidden in the shadows. The soloist, however, was clearly visible. She wore a white gown and stood center stage, bathed in a soft light that caused the fabric to glow. A cascade of flowing hair made of black ringlets tumbled behind her, falling to well below her waist. She simply held her hands together, waiting. About to begin again, she opened her eyes, those deep green eyes, and stared straight ahead, looking slightly above the audience.

Oh dear! he thought as he looked upon this seventeen-year-old girl, a child he had known since her birth. It *is* Gladys! His heart sank at the realization.

Two months ago, while traveling in Africa, he received a letter from her parents, summoning him home to Coeur d'Alene. The letter explained that the high school choir teacher had discovered that Gladys had a gift for singing, and soon everyone in town knew of the shy, mostly friendless girl with the voice of an angel. Now she was being requested to sing at parties, churches, and all school functions. A college in California had just offered her a full scholarship, and, as per previous agreement, her parents left any life-changing decision to him, her uncle. So here he was.

In the gymnasium's front row sat her parents, surrounded by neighbors and strangers, all listening quietly and intently. The entire room realized that they were witnessing something special: a performer far beyond her years in ability, with a voice that reached out to them and into their hearts. As Gladys continued, even her typically stoic parents began to shed tears.

The piece continued, and all held their breath. Gladys sailed through the aria with absolute perfection, not warbling in vibrato but gliding clearly, like a beautiful sailboat upon quiet waters: smooth and calm, yet powerful and purposeful.

He, her uncle, was also affected by the purity and grace of the performance. In fact, he was affected more than anyone else in the auditorium. And though he was proud of her ability, he felt mostly concerned. Where did this talent come from? he wondered.

Too soon, the performance ended, bringing a bitter relief to those who had not taken a breath in over three minutes. What followed was complete silence.

Eventually, the slight thump of the pianist's foot releasing the sustain pedal was heard.

Gladys blinked and then lowered her eyes to the audience. No one was moving. A few soft sobs came, apparently from some of the women in the audience. Then, building slowly: applause. It grew until the room filled with the roar of admiration and approval.

Gladys flashed an embarrassed smile.

Her uncle shook his head before donning his hat, then walked out into the night. Dear! She indeed possessed an amazing talent, but where she was headed, this talent would only present problems. Her world, literally, was going to change, be turned

upside down! And how would she react? After some thought, he concluded that she would be all right with it.

2

Eleven Years Earlier Ganymede, 1938

Ganymede was ugly. The dark ice-moon of Jupiter, as seen from space, resembled a ghostly face: pale green-gray skin with dark purple scars from ancient impact craters and tectonic splintering left schisms in the frozen surface. Some of these rifts were hundreds of miles long, crisscrossing the moon as if it were a victim of a celestial knifing.

Under a thin atmosphere that clung to the surface were several layers of dense matter. The first was cratered and splintered ice, up to fifty miles thick. Directly beneath was a mineral-rich crust, roughly ten miles thick and born of early volcanic activity. The third deepest layer held ancient condensed ice riding atop a massive subterranean ocean. Below that sea were additional layers of ice, then a mantle surrounding the molten iron core, still cooling from the moon's violent birth.

Ganymede was also beautiful. If conditions were right, passersby could witness intense and shimmering blue auroras shooting a thousand miles into space from both the north and south magnetic poles. Water from the moon's subterranean ocean, heated by its core, burst upward by way of vents, passed various layers of ice and crust, blasting liquid a quarter-mile into the sky. The rocketing water quickly froze into gigantic white and green-tinted ice towers that formed a sprawling forest covering hundreds of thousands of square miles.

However, the true wonder of this world was hidden deep within.

In the great canyons that had been formed on the moon's surface, life took hold. Several canyons were up to five miles deep and seventy miles wide and stretched to over eight hundred miles long. They were each a geothermally heated ecosystem, complete with seas, lowlands, small mountain ranges, and sprawling jungles. Unlike the surface of Ganymede, the atmosphere within the canyons was rich with oxygen, nitrogen and hydrogen, and moisture from thermally heated oceans that created dense clouds. These elements were held inside each canyon by a swirling blue *fálouse*, the topmost atmospheric layer.

Each *fálouse* extended outward past its canyon's edge for several miles in all directions, over the surface of the moon. Here, moisture met with subzero temperatures and fell as snow. Vast glacier fields were formed and eventually crept back toward the great canyons' edges where, again, they encountered heat. The ice sheets melted. The

water charged over the rim, creating countless waterfalls that fell for five miles. Once reaching the canyon floor, lakes and rivers formed. Some falls crashed directly into the seas, sending clouds of mist that rose a thousand feet.

Life-giving elements were trapped in the continuous cycle of each canyon's biosphere. Lifeforms flourished in the lowlands, the air, the sea, and even clinging to the steep stone walls. In countless and varied species, a bioluminescent effect occurred on a massive scale. The result was a persistent greenish-blue glow, which cast everything inside the canyons with a steady, unwavering twilight. The seawater's violent churning caused by the massive waterfalls initiated bioluminescence of the abundant marine life, lighting the mist and water with what looked like a billion sparkling blue and green stars. Only when distant sun rays or the glow of the ever-present gas giant Jupiter found its way through the fálouse did the blue-green aura change. Gold and white beams of light pierced through high clouds to reflect off the seas and sheer walls of ice, creating countless speckles of brilliant, glimmering light.

One humanoid species successfully advanced, and over the eons, formed great civilizations that populated every major canyon on Ganymede.

Áhtha, they called their world, and the canyons they called *tars*.

Each of the five great tars held its own nation. The two most advanced, *Tar Aséllo* and *Tar Éstargon*, worked closely together, developing technology. Eventually, they built spacecraft that orbited and studied the gas giant Jupiter, even landing on several neighboring moons. They ventured further, rocketing to see the rings of Saturn and its hundred satellites.

But in the early days of the Áhthan year 1021, the discovery of radio signals from within the solar system created a frenzy of scientific activity and great excitement. Life existed elsewhere!

After listening to broadcasts and gazing through newly developed high-powered telescopes, they learned a great deal about the distant world. Once video signals were discovered, they had seen images of the beings there. They were quite similar, except for 'hair' and the number of digits on hands and feet. They were basically the same size. Though Áhthan civilization was a thousand years older than their newly discovered neighbors, they realized the two societies were alike in many ways, including technological advancement—except in the area of space travel. Here, the Áhthans had progressed years beyond those living on the third planet from the Sun.

The lure of exploration was strong, and though cautious, the Áhthans decided to visit the planet that the beings residing there called *Earth*.



In the Eastern Province of the enormous canyon of Tar Aséllo, Bortus Bay sat next to the turbulent gray water of the Girth Strait. Dark waves pounded the shoreline made of

a hundred reddish-brown weathered boulders, each nearing one hundred feet in width. Some piled upon others while many rested halfway submerged in the water, creating islands of solid rock. Few land animals made the bay home. Plants were scarce on land and in the water, meaning sea life, abundant throughout the tar, ignored the waters of Bortus Bay.

Two miles east of the bay sat Targan Base. Surrounding the facility on three sides were steep walls of stone and ice, reaching the blue, misty fálouse five miles above. The Base was a simple series of buildings constructed in the towering style that mimicked the natural stone pillars that appeared throughout Tar Aséllo and on the moon's surface. Targan was initially a military base built during the last of the wars with the nearby nation of *Tar Fórtus*. With that conflict was over, the base was modernized technologically through a partnership between Tar Aséllo and its western neighbor, Tar Éstargon. In just two-thirds of an Áhthan year, Targan transformed into a center for space exploration.

The Targan Base Command Center contained a viewing lounge on the twenty-first floor. It looked out over the base, giving an expansive view of the launch pad, launch control tower, and the rocket ship named *Explorer Eleven*. The ship would be home to three Áhthan astronauts: two from Tar Éstargon and one from Tar Aséllo.

Explorer was neither sleek nor bulky. It was over two hundred feet long and, at its widest, sixty feet. Shining polished silver-blue metal covered most of the craft.

The topmost quarter of the craft contained the crew section. Two delta fins on each side jutted outward, each holding hoverjet units that allowed the vessel to retain its position above the ground. They were for atmospheric maneuvering only.

Inside the crew section in the forward-most area was the command deck. Three seats were situated forward-center. Here, each doubled as a cryogenic sleep chamber. A mostly screen-based control board sat immediately in front of the seats, and above was a bubble-like viewshield that ran the width of the craft and along the sides, even offering a view to the rear.

Behind the command deck was the lounge, a good-sized area used for some work but mainly as an eating, hygienic, exercise, and conferencing space. Behind the lounge was a firewall, then the atmospheric and sub-space engines, to be used when approaching Earth and maneuvering through its thick atmosphere.

The remaining three-quarters of the ship was made entirely of the main propulsion engines, driven by both nuclear and rechargeable compressed hydrogen fuel cells. Seven circular adjustable engine nozzles were positioned at the rearmost portion of the section and were used for lift-off and reaching escape velocity. The incredible speed generated would propel the craft through the depths of space to Earth. This section would be detached and set in orbit when not needed, then eventually re-attached for the return trip.

Today, *Explorer Eleven* was to begin its almost four-year journey to Earth, traveling

four hundred million miles. Arrival was scheduled for the Earth date of January 6th, 1942. The three-person crew was to make first contact with the intelligent beings there and learn and share information. In late 1956, they would begin their four-year journey home, arriving Dec 21, 1960. The entire trip would span just under twenty-two Earth years.

One figure was the center of attention, at least for today: Minister Commander Eno Ólaviath. He was tall and thin, arms gangly, and large expressive eyes ready to engage with anyone on any subject. Eno's 'hair' — actually a full head of thick, feather-like strands referred to as a *mane* — was cut short. As with all Áhthans, manes changed color in whole or in part to reflect their mood. This was mostly an involuntary condition and could be embarrassing at times. But Eno was rarely embarrassed. His smile was infectious, his wit famous, his knowledge vast, his demeanor welcoming. As a science minister, he was often seen on various media outlets explaining 'how things work' in the physical world. A geologist, a physicist, a physician, and a sociologist, among other talents and skills, Eno was the perfect choice to command this historic mission.

"A momentous day for Asélians, my dear Eno," said Pronómio Tok, the current *Yahyéth*, the governor of Tar Asélló's North-Central province named *Oso-Gúrith*. Upon seeing Eno, he stood and motioned for him to join his small party at a window-side table overlooking the launch site.

Pronómio was in his prime, a robust man square of face and imposing to many as he stood almost a half a head taller and outweighed virtually everyone. He had a mane of jet black that curved backward and fell just below his shoulders. One of his best-celebrated talents was not his political will or acute sense of planning, but his ability to make each person he spoke with feel as if they were the most important person in the world. He was gracious, polite, engaging, and most famously, devious. He had risen quickly through the levels of Tar Asélló's government. His tough talk and zero-tolerance policy for uprisings led by the *Zakéema Front* resulted in his promotion to *Yahyéth* of the troublesome *Oso-Gúrith* Province. Many of the poverty-stricken people in *Oso-Gúrith*'s largest city, *Éhpiloh*, secretly supported the *Zakéema*. Soon the *Front* matured into a well-disciplined rank of dedicated soldiers, carrying out rare but effective attacks on the established government and the Asélian citizenry.

Eno Ólaviath gladly approached Pronómio, and they touched foreheads lightly, as was the Áhthan custom between close friends.

"Please, please sit down for a moment if you can spare one," insisted Pronómio. "I know it is a busy day for you. Join us? For a moment?"

"Of course," said Eno.

Seated with Pronómio was Gakóh Kalífus, the Security Minister of *Oso-Gúrith*. He had a short and spikey dark gray feathery mane. Eno knew him as a quiet and serious man who had been associated with Pronómio since school days, both coming from families entrenched in the upper echelon of the *Kóreefa* class. Pronómio brought Kalífus

to his team as Security Minister. Under their collective control, the crackdowns on the Front's suspected supporters were effective and, at times, brutal. Soon the Zakéema were all but gone from Éhpiloh. The popularity of Tok and Kalífus skyrocketed.

"The excitement, dear Eno!" said Pronómio Tok. "You will soon travel to meet beings from another planet!"

"Yes," agreed Eno. "Since the day we intercepted the radio-wave signals from Earth, I had hoped that we would visit them."

"Are you prepared, Eno?" asked Pronómio with deep concern. "The ship is functioning properly?"

"Yes," replied Eno. "This is the eleventh vessel of its kind to reach the stars. We are quite confident in its capabilities and condition. It will be a long journey and, as I believe, a safe and successful one."

"You, my friend, have circled the planet Ófeetis!" Pronómio stated with a sigh and a smile, "and have photographed Gayída and its rings up close! If you are confident, then that is good enough for me."

"I wish you good fortune," said Kalífus. "And be wary of the Earthlings. Though their 'war to end all wars' is over, they are a violent race. Some transmissions suggest there are still minor conflicts. Maybe I should go with you, yes?"

"If there is a security issue," joked Eno, "I will send for you immediately!"

They all laughed, hair flashing a tinge red for a moment. The four-year voyage to Earth would make that ridiculous, of course.

"I am happy to see the Ef Keería of Tar Éstargon here!" exclaimed Eno. "His two scientists are exceptional, a joy with which to work. The three of us make an excellent crew. It is a pity this may be our last joint venture with them."

Pronómio nodded his head in agreement. "The renegotiation of trade agreements between our two nations is deteriorating quickly. The Éstargonians insist that we abolish our class structure and adopt one that mimics theirs! What has that got to do with trade? Oh, I have been to Tar Éstargon, and I have seen their system of government. It is not the jewel they claim it is! It is unruly, overcrowded, and progress is slow. Many citizens do not know their place. We will not abolish our way of life, our class structure! Tar Aséllo is our nation, our tar."

"As you say, it is our nation," sighed Eno dejectedly. "The class structure is the most important cog in the great wheel that is Tar Aséllo."

"I am not sure the Tazáth agrees," said Pronómio, gesturing to another table. There sat the *Tazáth*, Tar Aséllo's elected leader, Hátha Feh. She was surrounded by her ministers and governors, all in their white, long coats. Though supported by many, Feh was not as popular as she had once been. A growing number of ministers and Kóreefa business industrialists accused Tazáth Feh of being too soft on the Zakéema and their supporters.

"She is walking on the fálouse, as we say," said Kalífus.

"That is what I hear," agreed Eno, "though, as you know, I try to avoid the political arena."

"Yes, and I envy you," Pronómio said. "But Tazáth Feh is considering capitulating to the Éstargonians. It will upset the entire class structure!"

Pronómio was becoming upset, his mane changing to a dark blue at the edges. He caught himself, then took a breath.

"It is not yet known to all," Pronómio continued, "but there will be a vote of confidence within twenty days. It will be a close vote, I calculate."

"Who will be positioned as her replacement?" asked Eno.

Pronómio only smiled, somewhat evilly, his mane now returning to black but with a few red streaks now appearing.

"You?" asked Eno, surprised. "Really? Well, well, well! There is no better choice for our leader! I will have my assistant draft a proclamation and send it to the Board of Ministers before I leave!"

"I thank you," said Pronómio. "Unfortunately, I need a few more supporters. I have heard that your brother and his wife will vote to retain Hátha Feh and her policies."

Eno knew that his brother Tye Ólaviath, the Minister of Law, and his wife, Dypónia Aséllo, the Minister of Tar Relations, held radical positions regarding the long-established social caste system. They had worked with the Éstargonians to bring about change in Tar Aséllo. With the revered and historical last names of Aséllo and Ólaviath, they had considerable influence.

"Tye and Dypónia still hold the same beliefs as always, I am sorry to say," answered Eno, disappointedly.

"They have influenced the Tazáth," said Kalífus. "And I am sure she will soon give in to the Éstargonian demands. Can you imagine? *Graćenta*? The lowest class? Voting? Can you imagine the result of an emboldened Zakéema Front?"

"My brother, Tye Ólaviath," countered Eno, holding up a hand to calm the discussion, "does not advocate for the violent Zakéema."

"Yes, yes, but he does support the *Graćenta*, and he agrees with the Tazáth, at least partly—" Pronómio realized he was getting upset again. Taking a breath, he calmed himself. His smile returned. "I only wish your brother was with me on this."

"I know him well, Pronómio," replied Eno. "His heart is in the right place, and I would speak to him, again, however..."

"Yes! Yes!" interrupted Pronómio, promptly returning to the bright and pleasant friend. "You have a rocket to catch, and we will not see you for almost two years! That is what? Twenty-four Earth years?"

"Very close!" Eno stood. "Twenty-three point seven, give or take a few days!"

Pronómio stood and embraced Eno with the customary head-to-head touch and wished him good fortune and a safe return.

"Your crew awaits, Commander Eno Ólaviath," said Pronómio, his voice cracking

slightly.

Eno left the building and took a base car to the awaiting rocket. On the way, he instructed his assistant to draft his letter of support for his friend, Pronómio Tok. Once at the Launch Control Tower, he then took the lift to the top, staring at the rocket the entire time.

The lift stopped, and Eno exited into the Control Room, a one hundred foot-square center of technology and activity. Metal-walled workstations for the technicians, computer screens, monitoring equipment, and personnel filled the room. The only thing out of place was the couple holding the child.

“A final word with you, Eno?” asked Tye Ólaviath.

“Of course, brother.”

Eno followed Tye and his wife, Dypónia, to a large view window that overlooked the rocket.

“I want you to know that we will miss you,” said Tye, his brown mane dulling to a muted gold. “Almost two years will pass before you return. That is a long time for my younger brother to be gone.”

“And the Glassígh will be almost old enough for marriage when you return!” said Dypónia, holding her baby daughter in the pod. “It will not be the same without you, helping her to grow and learn.”

There were no more clan kings and queens in Tar Asélló, and there hadn’t been for seven hundred Áhthan years. That meant that Tye Ólaviath and Sypónia Asélló were the closest things to royalty that existed in the tar, and the Glassígh was the closest thing to a princess, even though there was no such word. She was simply referred to and understood as the Glassígh.

“She is loved by all,” Eno said. “Your wedding brought together the two most storied families of Áhtha! And now the progeny of both the Asélló and Ólaviath families, this Glassígh, is the joy for all.”

Tye frowned as he looked to the child. “She is popular. The posters, books, media broadcasts! The requests for information about every facet of her life—it can be quite ridiculous.”

“Such is the life of the famous,” replied Eno.

Dypónia smiled at her sleeping daughter. “She belongs to history now and to all in Tar Asélló. “But she is still *my* Glassígh.”

“I will surely miss her!” Eno said as he peeked under the veil that covered the pod. As if on cue, the Glassígh stirred from her slumber and opened her eyes, each looking like a precious and rare flower, emerald green with sparkling flashes of deep yellow and gold.

“Ah!” cried Eno softly, “she looked at me! A parting gift!”

“Then return to us, my brother,” said Tye.

“We will miss you,” added Dypónia.

They touched foreheads. Reluctantly, Eno turned and made his way to the bridge door. He activated his Arm Band Communicator, an *ABC*. These hi-tech wrist bands were combination audio and holographic video devices used for communication and displaying data from various systems, such as news broadcasts, entertainment, and research in government-supplied archives. They were also used for 'face-to-face' communication between citizens. They were perfect for the *Explorer* program as well. Eno preferred his Personal Display Tablet, his *PDT*. It was simple, had a larger yet more private display, more tactile, and, if configured correctly, unconnected from the tar-wide network. But for this mission's communications, he would tolerate the *ABC*.

"Mosca and DaJees, this is Commander Eno. I am done with the pleasantries and am on my way," he said. "What is our status?"

"This is DaJees," came her easy-going, professional voice. "I have completed the final diagnostic of the Voice-Activated Command Interface. *VACÍ* is now in control of *Explorer Eleven*. Mosca and I are seated at the command deck."

"Launch Control has transferred command of the ship to us," said Mosca, his tone a bit more anxious. "We only await your voice activation to start the launch."

"Excellent, and I apologize," Eno offered. He pressed a button on the panel of the doorway to the bridge. The door hissed open, and Eno turned to give one last wave goodbye to his brother, Dypónia, and the Glasígh.

An alarm sounded.

"Security alert!" broadcasted a computerized voice. "Unauthorized access to the launch area has been determined."

Tye and Dypónia nervously looked to Eno.

"Someone probably opened a locked door by accident," he called out to all. "Stay calm." The small group of workers wanted to believe him. "Nothing to worry about, I am sure."

Eno stepped out to the bridge to look downward. There, in the west corner of the launch pad, he saw figures in ragged black clothes running swiftly toward the base. Zakéema! Today? Now? He thought. Those rebels, in their dirty rags! It most certainly was something to worry about!

Eno watched as the Zakéema split into two groups: one heading straight for Base Command Center, the second of more than a dozen sprinting toward the Control Tower and *Explorer Eleven*.

Small projectile weapons opened fire on the first group of Zakéema as they ran toward the Base Command Center. Base security was increased by a few dozen members of the Asélló Military Force, the *AMF*. Surely they outnumbered these terrorists! thought Eno.

However, looking to the area below the Launch Tower, Eno saw that the group of intruders rushing to the rocket remained unchecked.

"DaJees! Mosca!" Eno called into his armband. "This is a serious threat. We are being

attacked by Zakéema terrorists. Stand by."

"Eno, what is your status? Where are they?" asked Mosca.

Eno looked over the side of the bridge railing again. Two hundred feet below, he saw the invaders reach the tower.

"They are at the door to the tower!" Eno replied into his ABC. "Targan Base Headquarters, do you hear me? We are under attack at the tower!"

"We hear you, Commander. Stand—"

The reply was cut off.

Eno could see multiple streaks of heavy arms fire striking the windows and doors of Base Command, coming from the Zakéema. AMF troops from within continued returning fire.

Tye stepped onto the bridge. Peering over the railing, he saw the havoc below. "Eno! What is this?"

Eno pushed his brother back inside and closing the bridge door. "Listen to me!" Eno called out so all could hear. "Zakéema are here. The Base Command Center is under attack. Rebels are at the base of the tower. But do not fear! We are safe here."

"Safe?" cried Dypónia as she cuddled the infant.

"They cannot reach us," Eno explained. "The tower lift is locked down automatically during an emergency. Only a technician can operate it with a passcode!"

Within seconds, they heard the lift motor whining as it came up to speed. A gauge above the door showed that the car was ascending. Eno ran to the lift control panel and entered a series of digits. A red light glowed around the mechanism. A video image from the lift camera came to life on a small screen adjacent to the door. It showed Zakéema, in the lift car, with hand-carried weapons and two large crates. They opened one as the lift rose.

Eno entered a security code into the door panel.

"I have locked the door," exclaimed Eno running back to the bridge. "They will not be able to get in!"

Tye grabbed him by the arm and pulled him aside.

"Brother, if they have heavy arms like what they are using on the Command Center, then what will stop them from destroying the tower in the same manner?"

"If they were going to destroy the tower, why come up the lift?" Eno replied. "But to be safe—listen! Everyone! Get behind the metal workstation panels or larger pieces of equipment! Spread out! Stay low to the floor."

"Have you no weapons?" asked Tye.

"We have two guards with small arms. But that will not hold them if they find a way in."

"Then there must be a way out!" his brother yelled.

"Unless we want to go for a ride on that rocket, no, there is no way out. But the lift doors are thick metal and reinforced with—"

The lift stopped.

Nothing happened.

The door was not opening.

All was still. The only noise was the crackling of Eno's armband and the voices of Mosca and DaJees asking for an update on the situation.

"We can hold out here until help arrives," said Eno quietly.

An ear-piercing hiss was heard. Soon it turned into a high-pitched whine; it came from the lift. Eno looked at the display screen by the door. The Zakéema had a torch drill. The door began to glow in a perfect circle as the torch rotated at high speed, digging a hole in the metal, sending sparks flying through the area.

"How did they get that?" Eno blurted aloud.

"It appears," observed Tye, "that the Zakéema have a bit more resources than we thought."

They were obviously coming inside. Did the Zakéema intend to destroy the rocket? Kill the crews? The technicians that were here? Eno suddenly felt sick to his stomach. How could this be happening? Targan Base was the most protected area of Tar Asélló, besides the Palace of the Tazáth.

"If they are Zakéema," his brother stated, "I can possibly reason with them."

"I don't think that would help," argued Eno.

"Yes, it might," countered Tye. "They know that I have been a proponent of the Graćenta, those that support them."

The ring on the door grew brighter.

"Harming me would damage their position," Tye continued. "They couldn't negotiate effectively if they —"

"Negotiate?" Eno laughed nervously. "If they wanted to negotiate — Tye! Who comes to a negotiation with heavy weapons? No, brother, stay hidden. Guards! Take up defensive positions at the door!"

The torch drill stopped.

The metal circle cut by the drill was kicked out from inside the lift, hitting the floor with a *CRANG!*

A smoke canister was tossed into the tower control room, expelling its contents into the air. Visibility dropped to almost zero. Eno and Tye joined the others in hiding.

A Zakéema soldier, in his greasy rags and mask, rushed inside and rolled to the floor. The tower guards saw him through the smoke and fired, missing him. The intruder spun around as another of his kind entered the room, firing his weapon. Eno and Tye watched from behind a panel as the first guard caught a bullet to the head. Another shot fired, and the second guard fell.

More Zakéema entered the room cautiously. There were at least ten of them with weapons level with the floor.

Eno could see Dypónia next to him, less than a few feet away, holding the pod with

the Glassígh inside. She was cowering, shaking, and then covered the child with her body as she wedged herself against the bridge door. Eno turned to Tye, but he was gone. What was he doing?

"I have contacts here!" yelled a Zakéema in a gruff voice.

"Do your duty!" called another Zakéema. "For the rebellion!"

The gruff-voiced Zakéema replied affirmatively then fired his weapon. Screams rose and filled the large room.

"More here, sir!" came another voice, followed by pulsegun fire.

"Cease fire!" yelled a voice. It was Tye. "Stop this massacre! I am Tye Ólaviath! Speak to me!"

A short but muscular Zakéema approached Tye.

Eno stood and looked in horror. What was his brother thinking? A last effort? To buy time? Or did he really think he could reason with these traitors?

"You are Tye Ólaviath?" asked the Zakéema.

"Yes, please, let us discuss—"

The Zakéema raised his weapon and fired.

Tye fell.

Eno shuddered in disbelief, falling to his knees in shock.

How could this happen? What purpose did this serve? To flex their muscle? The Zakéema Front was vastly outnumbered; they could never win against the forces of the Tazath. Were they insane?

Eno looked at the fallen body of his brother, then up to the killer. Their eyes met. The Zakéema fired as he ran closer, missing Eno by inches.

"Dypónia! We must go! To *Explorer*! Come!"

Eno pulled her along as she held her child in the pod, running, ducking behind panels and equipment as pulse shots missed them by inches. Once they reached the bridge door, Eno slammed his hand down on the access panel, and the door opened. The firing from the Zakéema intensified as they exited, the gun noise drowning out all other sounds. Eno paused at the outer door control panel and attempted to lock the exit. The hail of gunfire was intense, projectile and pulse rounds slamming into the walls and door frame. Unable to close the door behind him, he sped across the bridge with Dypónia and the child instead.

The infant began to cry as she was jostled about. Looking over his shoulder, Eno could see that the Zakéema had reached the open door. They were kneeling, taking up positions to fire across the fifty yards of the bridge leading to the rocket. Shortly, he could see the flashes from their pulse guns whizzing past.

Ahead, he saw hope: the door to *Explorer* was opening! Mosca and DaJees were now visible, standing in the opening and waving them onward to the safety of the ship.

Projectiles and pulsegun beams continued to race across the divide.

"Hurry!" called Mosca.

"I have the bridge controls in hand!" shouted DaJees.

"Start bridge separation! Start it now!" yelled Eno.

With a violent jerk, the bridge shuddered and began to move slowly away from the rocket.

The pulsegun firing continued. Eno looked to *Explorer*. The gap between the bridge and the ship was only a few feet at the most, an easy leap for them.

We might just make it! he thought.

"Run! Faster!" cried Mosca as he held out his hand. DaJees ran to his side, extending her arms, at times ducking the rounds that were hitting everywhere.

Several of the pulsegun beams raced across the gap from the control room toward *Explorer*, striking DaJees and Mosca. Their bodies went limp and then dropped forward off the ship's ledge, falling through the gap.

Suddenly, Dypónia let go of Eno's hand. She fell to the metal grating of the bridge—a stain of blood forming around her midsection. The pod carrying the Glassigh had also fallen. It tumbled toward the metal grating of the bridge. Eno leaped toward the pod as it bounced between the rungs of the railing. He dove, extending his arm, and grabbed the pod by the handle an instant before it fell.

"Eno!" the dying mother called.

"Dypónia!"

"Take her!" she cried with her last breath, "take my Glassigh!"

A round from a pulse weapon struck Dypónia where she lay. Then she was gone.

The Zakéema were now running across the bridge.

Eno turned toward the rocket, rushing with the child as fast as he could. The gap between the ship and the bridge had grown to over six feet. With the pod in his hands, he leaped. Landing hard on the thin metal ledge surrounding the door to *Explorer*, Eno fell inside, unceremoniously dragging the pod across the deck. A hail of pulse and projectile rounds struck the door to the craft. One bullet made it inside the ship, piercing Eno's arm just below the shoulder, spinning him around and knocking him to the floor. Wincing in pain, he reached up, and with his uninjured arm, slammed his hand on the access panel by the entry. The door whirred on its hinges and closed tightly with a soft thump of the vacuum-seal mechanism.

Eno breathed a sigh of relief and spoke a command.

"Vací! Engage force field!"

"Force field engagement underway," came her even, unemotional reply.

Within a few seconds, the blue glow of the force field surrounded *Explorer*. The shielding was strong enough to repel most of the dangers from micro meteors and other space debris. As the Zakéema continued firing, it was soon apparent that their weapons could not penetrate the ship's protected hull.

Eno gripped his wound. It was bleeding steadily, blood dripping down his arm.

The child wailed incessantly. Eno took her from the pod and quickly placed her in

the center seat in front of the control deck, adjusting the safety harness meant for a much larger occupant. She would be safe in the chamber if the Zakéema made it into the ship, for a little while at least.

“Vací! Activate seat two’s cryo-chamber and adjust for an Áhthan infant of one hundred days!”

“There are no crew members of that age or physiological classification,” she said.

“I know! Execute! Now!” Eno yelled. “Sedate her and darken the glass completely. Lock the chamber!”

After a moment, Vací responded:

“Chair two chamber set for Áhthan infant of one hundred days. Executing order to lock.”

From above the command seats, a heavy steel and glass cryo-lid descended over the Glassígh, and locked into place, creating an air-tight chamber and anti-gravity protection against g-forces. The glass darkened, hopefully hiding its contents. A click signaled that the lock was in place.

Holding his wound, Eno ran to the door’s viewport and looked across to the bridge, now over fifty feet away. Four men strained to remove something large and metallic from a rolling cart. It soon became apparent: a portable multi-fiber optic laser cannon. Eno had read about this weapon. Once loaded with a power cartridge, it would produce almost 500 kilowatts of destructive power in a single beam. Piercing the hull of a ship would be easy, he knew. Would *Explorer’s* advanced force field stop the blast? He didn’t know, and his head was too foggy for that type of calculation. And how did they acquire a laser cannon? Eno wondered. It was experimental!

Suddenly, he swooned. The blood loss from his injury was beginning to affect him. If the bleeding wasn’t stopped, he would soon lose consciousness and undoubtedly die. Eno ran to the cabin aid station, punched open the wall-hung unit’s cover, and grabbed a large-sized patch application. The package finally undone, he wrapped the bandage around his wounded arm. The material was pressure-sensitive, and within seconds, it tightly shrunk around the opening of the wound. He knew this was temporary at best—the bleeding was severe. He required serious medical attention immediately.

But there was still the issue of the irritating neighbors outside, bent on blasting him and the ship to pieces. He needed a way to defend himself and the Glassígh until help arrived; however, *Explorer Eleven* had no offensive weapons. Eno could do nothing unless he could point the ship at the Zakéema and ram them. Ridiculous!

Then it occurred to him. Mosca and DaJees had completed the checklist. The ship was ready for launch. If one can’t fight, one should run away, he thought.

“Vací! Begin cryogenic procedure...for my command chair,” he ordered as the dizziness rapidly increased. “Run full body scan and...and...administer medical aid...as necessary!”

If he could launch the ship and start the cryogenic sleep process before becoming unconscious, his body could be healed in transit. The medical programs and apparatus

built into the constant monitoring system within the chamber would work autonomously.

"Cryogenic procedures beginning for command chamber. Please return to the chair, Commander."

Eno staggered toward his command chair and unceremoniously collapsed into his seat. He concentrated as best he could to change the main panel view screen to the outside view. Once complete, he focused the camera on the Zakéema. The bridge was completely retracted, now one hundred feet away from *Explorer*. The cannon was still being prepped, though it would only take a few more moments before it was ready to fire.

"Vací, engage manual launch procedure!"

"Manual launch procedure executing," she said. *"Twenty seconds until manual launch availability. Course set and locked. Rocket ignition starts."*

As a rumble from below shook the craft, he realized that something was wrong. Yes! The course! That needed to be changed! He couldn't continue with the mission to Earth!

"Vací! Manually override course, set to standard low orbit for—"

"Course cannot be altered during manual launch sequence," Vací interrupted. *"Would you like to pause the launch?"*

"No, no, no! Do not pause launch!" Eno cried. He glanced at the viewscreen. A gunner was quickly taking a position to sight the laser cannon.

"Manual launch procedure continuing. Launch tunnel chambers doors opening."

Explorer Eleven groaned and vibrated as launch systems roared to life.

"Ten seconds until manual launch availability."

Outside, Eno could see the enemy's activity become even more frantic: they realized that the ship was in launch mode. They hurriedly loaded a three-foot-long silver metal power cartridge into the breach of the cannon.

"Five seconds until launch availability. Powering down force field as per launch procedure."

"What? N-no!" he cried.

A glance at the display screen showed the Zakéema rebels swiveling the gun into position.

"Four seconds..."

The Zakéema gunner stared through the cannon's sight.

Eno could see the green targeting beam flash as it passed the external camera.

He gripped the chrome launch lever on the panel to his right.

"Three...force field down."

The Zakéema pulled back the cannon's priming handle, its tip beginning to glow red, its engine whining, the laser about to activate.

"Two..."

The Zakéema gunner waved his crew away to safety. He was ready to shoot.

"One. Manual Launch now available."

A light glowed green, lighting up the entire command panel before him. Straining and in pain, Eno pulled the chrome lever down hard.

"Fire!" Eno cried.

Outside, the rocket's flames shot everywhere.

The tower and bridge shook violently, knocking a few intruders off the metal decking. The laser fired, but the force of the rocket's blast sent the beam off-target, past *Explorer*, and blasted a twenty-foot-deep crater into the tar's rock wall.

As the ship rose quickly off the pad, orange and black fire flooded out from the seven engine nozzles rose to a height and width that promptly engulfed the tower and the bridge. Though some Zakéema ran back to safety within the control room, others were vaporized by the flame.

Explorer Eleven thundered into the sky, racing to exceed Áhtha's escape velocity of almost two miles per second. Glancing out the right port window, Eno could see the surface of the tar wall rushing by in a blur. The ship was still shaking violently as the view changed from rock to ice that shined yellow and gold from the reflection of the engines' blaze. In a flash, Eno saw blue as he rocketed through the fálouse, then—blackness. The ship stopped shaking as it entered near space. Still, the hydrogen fuel-cell rocket engines' rumble continued, increasing *Explorer's* speed.

"Vací," said Eno, somewhat relieved, though struggling to remain alert, "change course to, umm...Áhthan orbit test."

"Mission map changes require a secondary command crew member authorization."

"I have no...secondary! I am the only occu—"

Eno stuttered. His eyes loosely focused on the cryo-chamber lid above him. Yes, it was descending. He could hear Vací's voice but could not make out what she was saying. The cryo-lid continued its descent until it locked into position and sealed.

As Commander Eno Claviath lost consciousness, *Explorer Eleven* began its three-hundred-million-mile journey to Earth.

3

Far Side of the Moon

Once *Explorer* had reached Earth, Vací woke Eno from his four-year-long cryo-sleep. It took a few hours to orient himself, and eventually, he was able to ask for a status report.

"Vací," he said. "What has Earth been up to while I slept and recovered? Anything interesting?"

"I have been monitoring broadcasts since we left Áhtha," she said. "There is trouble, commander. This may explain. A message from the President of the United States of America."

She played the file.

"...Yesterday, December 7, 1941—a date which will live in infamy—the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan. The United States was at peace with that nation and, at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation with its Government and its Emperor looking toward the maintenance of peace in the Pacific."

"W-what?" exclaimed Eno as he listened to the broadcast. "How long ago was this broadcasted?"

"Just thirty Earth days ago," she replied. "Since then, there have been over seven thousand hours of broadcasts from over one hundred amplitude-modulated frequencies, from multiple broadcast sites over the globe."

"Unbelievable," was all Eno could say. "When did this begin? This war? An entire world, as large and prosperous as this? All the peoples at war? Again?"

"Broadcasts have been intercepted since the time of our launch from Áhtha," explained Vací. "A detailed analysis and text have been created for you. In summary: this was a gradual conflict that began in Earth year 1935 with political unrest in multiple areas. By 1939, shortly after our launch, the nation of Germany attacked and militarily occupied its neighboring nation of Poland and continued acquiring adjoining nations through warfare and other forms of subjugation. German armies currently control most of the eastern portion of the continent named Europe, displayed in red on your map. They are attempting to conquer neighboring nations to the north, west, and south."

Eno rubbed his eyes. "I can't believe this!"

"It is correctly reported. In the Pacific Ocean and eastern Asian continent, the Empire of Japan has been at war since 1931 with its neighbors, acquiring natural resources and land area. At this time, the war over island supremacy is being waged on the fronts shown in blue on your display. Both theaters have major air, sea, and land conflicts."

Eno just shook his head as he realized the extent of the battlefield.

"We couldn't have chosen a worse time to plan a visit. How could this have happened?" Eno asked. "We had been monitoring news broadcasts via radio waves for the past several Áhthan years! Yes, there was an almost worldwide war, but it had ended via treaty, and the Earthlings themselves had called it the *war to end all wars*."

"They were incorrect," said Vací.

He looked away from his monitor and out the wide, main viewshield above the command panel. *Explorer* was hiding behind Earth's dead moon. Eno adjusted their position to peek over the moon's horizon and observe the blue and white orb below. From here, Earth looked beautiful and welcoming, and peaceful. Later, with the telescopes mounted on his ship, he would witness the war's activities in real-time.

While the Glasígh slept in her chamber, Eno read the full report Vací had created. Earth's civilization might be a thousand years younger than those of Áhtha, he realized, but they were undoubtedly more proficient when it came to dreaming up ways to

annihilate each other in outright aggression. And all these resources and space! And this is what they chose to do with it? It was illogical.

Once Eno finished reading, it was time to contemplate his options. Option one would be to return to Áhtha right away, but physics would not allow this. The nuclear fuel was all but spent on the deep space trip to Earth. The procedure to replenish that meant finding and processing uranium. Explorer had the device to accomplish that, but not the Uranium, which was on Earth's surface.

Additionally, due to the changing positions of the elliptical orbits of the two bodies—Earth and Jupiter (or Ófeetis as it was called on Áhtha)—they were well over five hundred million miles apart. The mission parameters had planned on the worlds being in opposition, meaning at their closest points, under four hundred million miles from each other. It would be eleven more years until they were again close enough to make the journey home.

Another option would be to continue with the mission and make first contact. But with this war going on, Eno decided that was unwise. If years and years of listening to Earth broadcasts had taught the scientists of Áhtha anything, it was that Earthlings were constantly attempting to get an advantage over other Earthlings. If war broke out, which it had, they would undoubtedly draw the visiting Áhthans into the battle. Not them personally, but the technology on the ship would certainly be coveted.

The only course of action would be to land on Earth, remain incognito, start the hydrogen charging and locate some uranium. In the meantime, Eno could observe and document behavior, the natural world, customs, etcetera—so the entire mission would not be a failure. He could then wait until the time was right to return, as planned, in Earth year 1956.

But what to do about the Glassígh? he thought. I have to wake her, don't I? I can't allow her to sleep until 1956! The extended cryogenic process may have already affected her development.

"Vací, I have developed a plan," Eno announced as he walked to the lounge area of the ship. "I need you to tell me if it is a feasible design. Please access proper AI programs to attend."

"AI programs accessed."

"I have decided to stay and observe Earth incognito. I will gain fuel and supplies needed for return. Opinion?"

"The only reasonable choice."

"Good," said Eno. "I also will attempt to live among the Earthlings, and I will have the Glassígh do the same. Opinion?"

"Chance of success near zero."

Eno would have expected nothing less, so he fed additional causal factors into the program.

"I will physically alter our appearance to blend in with the Earthlings: minor facial

reconstruction, prosthetics to change our nasal appearance. Opinion?"

"Chance of success raised to eleven percent." Vací and her AI were not convinced.

"I will remove digits from appendages as necessary. Opinion?"

"Chance of success raised to fifteen percent," Vací said. *"Your plan for the difference between Áhthan mane and human hair?"*

Eno hadn't thought of that. Neither could walk about Earth with a head covered with what would look to Earthlings like feathers! And if the Glassígh's mood changed? And the color of the ends went from black to red? In an instant? No, no, no, Eno thought. Maybe...

"I will remove the child's masguliar gland!" Eno triumphantly proclaimed.

Áhthan's were born with curly, ringlet-like hair, all single strands that demonstrated a more bilateral structure that caused the hair to curl. However, as puberty arrived at approximately one Áhthan year, the masguliar gland would produce pasterpeptide, and the childhood hair would be replaced with a more concentric arrangement of different cortical proteins that caused the feathery-like mane and abrupt color changes. A simple procedure for an experienced physician such as Eno Ólaviath, removing the gland would stop producing pasterpeptide.

"Chance of success raised to eighteen percent."

"I will shave my head," he added. "Daily."

"Chance of success raised to twenty percent," Vací responded.

"Vací! I would think that would be a higher number! What is the issue?"

"Two major issues jeopardize the mission," she said. *"One is where you choose to locate. Most concerning is that the war could spread to your location, and you might be killed."*

"That would be...unfortunate," agreed Eno. "We will choose a safe location, least likely to be in a conflicted zone. Recommendation?"

"America," suggested Vací immediately, *"preferably away from the coastlines or large cities. The area called Northern Idaho would be optimal. It is sparsely populated yet has basic technology and resources. This raises the likelihood of success to thirty-three percent."*

"And the other major concern?" asked Eno.

"It is your skin color. The deep olive-brown skin of Áhthans will resemble particular Earthlings that are persecuted in many parts of the world, especially in America. There have been mass extermination, murder, and refusal of fundamental rights. Like the Graćenta, they are considered a lower class."

Eno thought of this for a while.

"Can we stay in an area where there are other dark-skinned beings?"

"Not safely," Vací stated, *"and not if you will want to travel the world freely. You must lighten your skin to a more pinkish or tan hue."*

"What if...I use daily doses of genetically modified forskolinthain glycerodes to change our skin color," suggested Eno. "It would take a few weeks, but we could lighten our skin by about sixty percent? Opinion?"

"You will resemble the African, Latin, and Italian peoples, among others."

Vací displayed pictures on his PDT of dark olive and brown-skinned people with dark hair.

"Handsome, I must say," Eno muttered.

"If you choose Idaho...and complete the alterations and skin lightening..." said Vací as she continued her calculations, *"this raises the likelihood of success to seventy-six percent."*

"Splendid!" exclaimed Eno. "Moving on! So I may be free to explore, I will have the Glassigh raised by Earthling parents. She has no language skills yet, so the immersion in the language, culture, and systems will be convincing. I will swear them to secrecy. Opinion?"

"Chance of success lowered to twenty-seven percent."

"As a means ensuring that secrecy," Eno continued, undaunted, "I will pay the Earthlings in gold to raise her, as we have a large store of it onboard. Opinion?"

"Chance of success raised to eighty-seven percent," said Vací.

Eno smiled.

"I also suggest you set the deep space module in static orbit on the dark side of this moon, out of Earth's view," Vací added. *"There are no space-capable vehicles on earth so that it will remain hidden. When you land, hide the crew section of the ship."*

"Vací, I am insulted you even felt the need to say that, but thank you for the guidance. Anything else?"

Vací rattled off several obvious recommendations, such as dressing like an Earthling, not straying too far from the Glassigh, allowing no one to examine her medically, avoiding any physical confrontations where one could be injured, and avoid the war at all costs.

"Anything else?" asked Eno as he stood to look out the main viewport, observing Earth and its problems.

"Yes," said Vací. *"Deep analysis and the running of over ten thousand possible scenarios conclude that it is imperative you do not tell the child she is Áhthan."*

Eno hadn't thought of that.

Light of Ganymede is available on Amazon:

<https://www.amazon.com/Light-Ganymede-Book1-Glas%C5%9Bigh-Trilogy-ebook/dp/B092YYM4X>

More info on this new book series available at:

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