

Alien Whispers

Conflict and Communion

Milijun Book 3

Like the worm in the soil, or the spider in the web, we know nothing of creation save that of our immediate surrounds. For that is all we need to know in order to survive.

Clayton Graham

Cast of Principal Characters

Humans

Laura Sinclair – mother of the First See, Jason Sinclair

Matthew Cabella – Second Lieutenant [ex]

Damien Sanderson Dayananda – Tellurian head

Belle Aubertin – Tellurian official, leading searches for ACE

Len and Ben Navarro – twins. Underground operatives.

Spencer Navarro – Underground cell leader

Simon Cordell – ex-lunar miner, the man who started it all.

Aliens

Rfinsatarji, to be called Rfinsa – Rbuzen native from planet Glieze

Relna – female human-Rbuzen hybrid

Randra – male human-Rbuzen hybrid

Rsusa - female Gerb-human hybrid on Mars

Nur – Rkem nagib, an advanced robotic species, also known as greys

PROLOGUE

AD 2288

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Eucla was a shell, desolate and haunted, harbouring memories of events that were still beyond Laura Sinclair's comprehension.

She stood at the entrance to the old military base, sheltering from the heat of the sun beneath the protection of the high walls. There were no guards, no scanning machinery, nothing that could be described as militaristic at all. In fact, if she so desired, she could walk straight in through the open gates, cross the forecourt, and enter the decrepit buildings—buildings where mysterious happenings had unfolded all those years ago.

It was nothing like the base she had known, the base commanded with an iron fist by Major General Sebastian Ord, who had died a sudden death at Milijun as the alien robot he had carried abruptly vacated his body's inter-dimensional space.

Laura was not surprised at the devastation, but regretted it all the same, for the Eucla base held vibrant reflections of a changing world. If there were such things, the ghosts of sacrificed women would be frequenting the rooms within. It had all been over one hundred years ago! A lot had happened since then: the abduction to Glieze; the return of the hybrids to the joint Terran-Gliezan base on Mars; the ageing of her son, Jason, from a teenager to a man.

And during that time I have hardly aged at all!

She had returned to Earth to help collect her thoughts, to ground herself, to regain her normal emotional state after the intergalactic Gliezan interlude. This despite Jason's warning that the home planet was in dire straits, or, as the female hybrid Relna had phrased it in her clipped alien accent, it was *in retrogression*. What did that mean anyway? On the way to oblivion? Marked for human extinction?

She wanted to see, wanted to tread familiar territory—and sooner rather than later, she wanted to visit the home where she and husband Dek had raised Jason. Or at least what was left of it; what parody now stood in its stead over one hundred years later. And she was not afraid to admit that she longed to view the place where Jason had once been an energetic and lovable teenager.

As soon as her feet had touched the soil of Earth again, recollections of her pre-abduction days had come flooding back. Not only the incidents at Milijun and Eucla, but her life prior to all that devastation; her normal life. The marriage to Dek—who was now well and truly gone—the amazing birth of Jason, their family adventures together, many of them on the water, and then the slow crumbling of marital love under the pressures of daily existence and the fight for survival in a world that still showed the scars of war.

They had been separated for five years prior to her abduction. Throughout that time, they had communicated occasionally; polite but not effusive remembrances of happier days, as if neither of them would admit to any remnant feelings for the other. Stupid, she had thought at the time, still did for that matter. They were both stubborn, strong-willed by nature, and her vacation with Jason across the vast Nullarbor had been her attempt to celebrate some kind of freedom. How ironic was that?

But now she wanted to know what had happened to Dek. Had he met someone else? Had more children? She wanted to know how he had lived and died during her sojourn in space.

And she had to start here—where it all began, where she had rescued some of the women who were carrying the human-alien hybrids.

They had escaped, only to go from the frying pan into the fire. The mothership had come and spirited them away to the Gliezan space station, untold light years distant and so alien it had distorted their hold on reality and on the fabric of time itself.

But at least they were back, she thought. If not on Earth, at least close by on Mars. And the aliens were with them, not just their abductors, the Rbuzen, but their ancient enemy on Glieze, the Gerb. And it had been Jason who had brokered the unlikely peace between the alien factions, and it was he who now commanded the joint Martian base.

The Martian settlement had been championed and founded by Nomi, Major General Sebastian Ord's mole at the outback research station called Milijun. Nomi had since gone on to become Colonel Norma Millison. At the time of Milijun, she had been young, eager, and headstrong—and escaped from the research base with all its secrets on file, including the alien ones!

Millison, the base on Mars named after Nomi, currently held over two hundred personnel, consisting of humans, Rbuzen, and Gerb—who were essentially ancient Rbuzen, she reminded herself—and the extraordinary hybrids, all ably supported by plentiful *RNasia* and a few nagib, cybernetic alien robots that possessed amazing powers. The Martian enclave appeared to have only one purpose: the exploration of the universe and its physical and interdimensional components. For, as

Rjebnigerssel, their alien mentor on Glieze, had once pointed out to Jason: why else were they in the universe at all?

But none of that was for her. She had finished being played by both humans and aliens alike. She had finished with travelling through interstellar space and time. That, she thought ruefully, she would leave to Jason, the Rbuzen *First Seen*.

Laura took a deep breath and walked through the huge gates.

There were two wrecked vehicles in the yard, not military but large hydrogen-powered utility wagons, the sand-covered gravel beneath their distorted sponge-like wheels betraying no sign of footprints. In fact, the surrounding terrain seemed undisturbed no matter where she cast her gaze. Nobody had been here for a long time. Or maybe the wind had shifted the evidence, blown it away in an attempt to confuse the unwary trespasser.

There was nothing in the vehicles except the faint smell of urine and sun-blistered upholstery. Everything inside the wagons was faded, as if occupying dimensions half-removed from the ones she occupied. Someone, someone desperate, had probably lived in the cars for a while.

As she crossed the open area on approach to the main building's door, Laura recalled events that had taken place here more than a century ago: her search for Major-General Ord's office accompanied by the insect-like bionic micro aerial vehicle; the control room where, assisted by Uriel's cloaking device, she had threatened violence upon the military personnel; the cells where the women were held prisoner; the congregation of Special Forces personnel that had started the entire chronicle.

Laura traversed the yard, pausing only at the entrance to the main building, a little hesitant to go beyond the open threshold. She wondered how long the base had

remained functional after the events at Milijun, and whether it would tell her anything of the countless years since her rapid departure from the planet.

She took a step and stood beneath the portal, encircled by the huge door frames; the doors were long gone, perhaps stolen for firewood or ravaged by time. She swivelled, casting her eyes back along her entry trail. There, stood between the enclosure's great gates, was her nagib escort: a robotic servant of the Rkem, those otherworldly beings who had seemed to rule the roost on Glieze. It would wait faithfully for her to return, at least for a good while yet.

And nearby, the saucer would be hidden in dimensions beyond her ken.

As she entered the building, a cocktail of excitement and trepidation coursing through her veins, Laura Sinclair pondered upon the nagib: the highly intelligent cybernetic partners of the mysterious Rkem. Of all the aliens she had encountered, this creature seemed the most mysterious of all. But, of course, unlike Jason, she had not met their masters, the Rkem.

The nagib had visited Earth many times in the past, and were now an essential part of the Martian colony, but this particular one—was it her protector, her observer, or her leader? It mattered not, for at the moment she was on her own. She just knew that nagib were described as *greys* by the people of the past.

Laura was dressed in Martian garb: a dark blue sleeveless shirt, black tracksuit pants, and yellow, thick-soled runners. Her blond hair was now half-way down her back, tied with a sky-blue ribbon near the top; a pony tail that resembled a stallion's tail. At Jason's insistence, she toted a small laser pistol in the right pocket of her pants. Her shirt pocket held a small but powerful flashlight, courtesy of the Martian stores.

Walking down the corridor, light of tread, she found where the elevators had once been. In their place was a huge empty shaft running up and down, disappearing into darkness. There is no power anyway, she mused, but wondered why they would have taken the lifts away. *Are there stairs?*

After a brief search, she found them. A fire escape, she reasoned, as they were devoid of decoration. She used the stairs, flashlight leading the way, stepping downward to the level of the cells where the Special Forces women had been

imprisoned. Memories came flooding back. Cell eleven! The cramped conditions, the huddled women, the sudden vanishing as Uriel had used Milijun's powerful technology to spirit them away.

Cell eleven was dark and dusty, unlocked, and unsympathetic to her enquiring gaze. Nothing remained. There was no sign that it had once been filled with miserable and mistreated human beings.

She checked other cells, including ones where she had not previously gained access, but they were all the same. At least there were no one-hundred-year-old skeletons. The air was musty, a little damp, and she thankfully made her way upstairs to the offices and control rooms.

Some of the walls still carried directional signs, and most of the corridors were covered with malodourous threadbare carpets that must have been installed some considerable time after the Milijun events, as she could only recall there being hard, blue floors. Perhaps the base had not been vacated all that long ago. Well, she corrected cynically, glancing again at the carpet, maybe no more than fifty years ago.

Laura found her way to what had been Sebastian Ord's office. Unlike Nomi, he was not an ally from the distant past, more like an antagonist—the man who had ordered the capture of Special Forces *RNasia* carriers, both male and female, after the battle at Cocklebidy Cave. A man, she supposed, undertaking his honour-bound duty.

A shiver ran down her spine as she recalled the image the BMAV had shown her when she was previously in this corridor: research leader Dr Markus Singh sprawled on the floor, killed by Ord or something worse.

This time, the door was ajar and, not unexpectedly, it carried another name: Major-General Simon Brodeur. Not Ord's successor, she realised, but decades of

military generations further down the line. She gently pushed the door open and shone her flashlight around the room. A large desk, two chairs, several cabinets, two large, dusty pictures hanging askew behind the desk. For a second she thought she saw Singh's body on the floor: a nerve-racking flashback, nothing more.

Laura stood there for a full minute, her flashlight catching dust motes in the air. What she really wanted was some evidence of Nomi's long-ago presence; some unwritten signature that she may have unwittingly left behind. Nomi was, after all, the keeper of the secrets of Milijun. Had no doubt used them to push for alien collaboration on Mars. And she had succeeded, for the Martian base was named after her.

Laura recalled her remembrance plaque on Mars:

In commemoration of the founding of Millison

Colonel Norma Millison, known as Nomi

Gracious founder and leader

May she find peace among the stars

Came to us: 2160 Left us: 2256

She estimated that Nomi would have reached the rank of colonel over a period of twenty years or more, somewhere around 2200, and that would likely have been around the time she had been given the authority to plan for Mars. But from Eucla or elsewhere?

The more Laura thought about it, the more she realised that Nomi had probably left here long before the base's closure. But where had she gone to?

Laura pursed her lips. She didn't want to spend much longer in this dismal, old military bastion, but she thought a survey of the officers' headquarters was worth undertaking. If she found nothing, then nothing was lost.

Returning to the corridor, she trained her torch to the right—and heard a noise. She immediately switched off the beam, kept perfectly still, and listened intently. There it was again. Voices, echoing eerily down the corridors, and not too far away. Her hand instinctively went for her laser.

Silence ensued, just as frightening now she knew of another presence in the building.

The sound of approaching footsteps broke the momentary quiet; more than one person, she was sure. She stepped back inside Ord's old office, pocketed the torch, and held the gun in front of her with both hands. Men conversing, and coming her way. *Who are they? What on Earth are they doing here?*

Through the half-open door, Laura could see torchlight dancing on the floor of the corridor. Was the door ajar before? Relief flooded her mind as she recalled that it was, but maybe not as much as it was now. *Will they notice? Shall I close it more?*

It was too late. She went behind the door and held her breath.

The footsteps stopped. Light played into the office, swept across the floor. She looked down. *Jesus aid me.* Footsteps in the dust, her footsteps.

Laura moved back from the door. *If they push it hard, I will be crushed.*

They had gone silent, and she knew they were about to enter the office. She retrieved the torch, holding the laser pistol in her right hand. Then she swept the door fully open and yelled: "I'm armed! Stay where you are!"

She switched on her torch and played it over the two figures in the corridor. Two figures, but not two men. One was a serv, seemingly a modern version of the human-sized robots she had seen at Milijun.

"Who the hell are you?" the man grated.

"Turn your friend off," Laura replied, waving the pistol.

The man shrugged and touched his wristband. The serv's head and shoulders slumped, but it remained on its feet. Laura gave it a quick glance, one wary eye still focussed on the stranger. A century ago the servs had not possessed human features, but this one did, right down to the eyebrows. Below the waist, its legs carried both knee and ankle joints; the thighs and calves being around the same diameter as a well-developed upper human arm. The torso was different to what she recalled, leaner—much more humanlike, with realistic arms, hands and fingers. The whole body was silver, shining brightly under her torchlight.

She turned her attention to the man. To her surprise, he was dressed in an army uniform, dirty, dishevelled, torn in places, but still recognisable.

“Who the hell are you?” the man asked again. “Why are you here?”

Laura levelled the laser directly at the man's face. “I've got the gun. I'll ask the questions.”

“Can we sit down somewhere,” he responded. “I get tired easily.”

She hadn't expected that. She studied him for a moment, sizing him up. Unshaven, somewhere between forty and fifty, some grey in the hair, slim, not really filling the uniform. He didn't appear to be armed. She waved the laser at Ord's door. “Inside. Leave your serv here.” Then quickly added: “Wait. Give me your wristband.”

There was no resistance. He really did look tired. She pocketed his wristband and gestured with the laser. “Inside.”

They both entered the office, Laura closed the door, and they sat facing each other on the two chairs. “Give me your torch,” she commanded, beginning to feel more in charge of the situation.

Again, no resistance. She placed both torches on the desk, pointing at the man's face. He looked haggard, as if he hadn't slept for a month.

“What’s your name?” she asked, keeping the laser trained on the man’s midriff.

“Matthew Cabella.” He shifted in his seat, and Laura’s grip on the pistol tightened. “Second Lieutenant.” He gave her a loose grin. “At your service.”

Laura frowned. “You were stationed here?”

He shook his head. “Hell, no. It’s well before my time. I just shelter here. Now and again.”

Laura frowned, a plethora of questions running through her mind. She stared directly into the Cabella’s blue eyes. “Do you know when this place closed down?”

He smiled again, unnerving her. “Don’t you?”

“Humour me. When did it close down?”

“Twenty two twenty-one. After the Spectrum Wars knocked everything for six.”

Sixty seven years ago, Laura thought. That made sense. And another war made sense, too. If she believed Jason and Relna. “Have you ever heard of a Colonel Norma Millison?”

Matthew Cabella raised his eyebrows. “Who hasn’t? She was drummed into us from the first day of recruitment.” He pursed his lips. “She’ll be long gone now.”

Laura frowned. “Drummed into you?”

“Held up as a paragon of zeal and enterprise, as the ultimate soldier, a great leader—and also as one of the prime causes of the Spectrum Wars.”

Laura inhaled sharply. “Tell me more.”

“The colonel was said to be the mastermind behind a so-called alien collaboration enterprise, ACE for short. Apparently she claimed knowledge of aliens and had the proof on file.” Cabella shrugged. “ACE started off as a branch of the military, but eventually got backing from international organisations and

governments. They became hot property as they grew larger and more purposeful, more powerful, if you like. Hot enough for certain agencies to want them destroyed.” Cabella looked hard into her eyes. “Where have you been? You should know all this. The rise of ACE caused the Spectrum Wars and made the world the way it is today.” He leaned forward, eyes half-crazed. “It happened ages ago.”

Laura’s mind was threshing like a demented harvester.

“Who wanted them destroyed?”

Cabella looked at her as if *she* was crazy. “I’m getting worried about you.”

There was no humour in his tone, and even though Laura had the laser, she was beginning to feel threatened.

“Why destroyed?” she repeated.

“There were many companies, organisations—even countries—who felt threatened by what ACE was attempting. And there’s not that many people in the world who want interaction with aliens.” He looked at her with his head on one side, reminding her of the Gerb. “Would you?”

A hint of a smile crossed Laura’s face. She didn’t know how to answer that, but she wasn’t going to tell Matthew Cabella anything about Milijun, or Glieze, or the Rbuzen for that matter. It would have been easy to do so. He had, after all, broached the subject.

“Tell me about the Spectrum Wars,” she said finally.

“Before our time,” Cabella responded, looking at her suspiciously. “But you must know something. Presumably you went to school.”

Laura waved the gun in his direction. He really was beginning to annoy her.

“Just tell me.”

The shrug again, accompanied by a blow through the lips.

“It’s basically simple,” he said. “They were not long after all nuclear weapons were destroyed and totally banned globally. But the spectrum technology was just as bad in my opinion. The wars ran from 2218 to 2220. Short and sweet, as wars go. Everything was jammed. All frequencies. The whole spectrum. Research stemming from efforts centuries ago. No communications. Zilch. Satellites and aircraft fell out of the sky.” Cabella took a deep breath, then continued, pausing at intervals, as if he was catching his breath. “They were trying to destroy ACE, but it got out of hand. Everything against ACE was dominated by fear of the unknown and communication with aliens.

“It effected land and sea transport. People became even more isolated than they already were following previous world conflicts. At that time, the only people you could talk to were those within earshot. Medieval. The end of the world, just as we were getting it together again.”

Laura began to wish that she had sought more information concerning Earth’s recent history when she was on Mars. At least nuclear weapons had been banned from the planet. There must be records somewhere, unless, of course, the Martian base wanted to forget about Earth and forge their future in the stars.

“It was essentially a communication technology war,” Cabella continued. “For or against ACE and what they stood for. Forward or backward. Inward or outward. Or maybe it was just an excuse for a power grab. ” He blew through his lips again. “Everything fell apart. Countless people perished. Millions.”

He looked at her, a strange expression on his face. “You really don’t know do you?”

