

A CALL FOR HELP

Any military is a combination of boredom and intense action. Patrols were an example of the boredom part. The crew of the Rexor, a Valiant class pinnacle, knew this too well. They had embarrassed the wrong executive in the Andromedaen Conglomeration and this was a marine's reward. Rahtari Tanu, an Emperor Gren with uncharacteristic humility, had blamed himself for the predicament his company found itself in. He had been the one who had made the call to capture the "escaped criminals" rather than kill them as their orders had implied.

He sat in the communications shack and sighed. It had been a long boring tour and the company was losing its edge. He knew no combat meant no deaths. Any time you fought you risked casualties but without combat you had no bonuses, no excitement and only drudgery to look forward to.

He brought himself back to the present with a shake of his mane. A distant distress signal had plotted out to their patrol sector, but only barely. "Corporal, what was the ID again?"

"Sir, XX-23455, Research vessel Santius on a survey of system C-28k5. They reported engine malfunction then the signal went dead, sir." Corporal Erthat was always correct and focused.

"Bridge, best speed to the distress call." As the bridge officer acknowledged, Rahtari Tanu eased himself out of the comm room and aft to his small office. From here he could command missions and direct the ship as well as complete the never ending demand for paperwork. He looked over the manifests and was surprised at the amount of ordinance they picked up at the last re-supply station. His quarter master, Rgi. Jinny, had gotten into a row with the supply raghi on the station over that. Jinny was proud of her company and wasn't about to get them docked for carrying unnecessary

armament. They had not requested it but somehow had received enough weapons and ammo for three companies. This smelled like typical bureaucratic grief.

Six hours later and no closer to solving the mystery, Tannu was notified by the bridge that they were approaching the Santius. Initial scans showed her engines shut down but signs of life were present. Tanu tied into the ships sensors and displays from his office. The ship showed no signs of external damage. The engines were off line, but the power plant was almost at maximum. That was not only dangerous but hard to explain. He sent a hail only to be greeted with static. "Bridge, prepare emergency dock with the Santius."

"Sir, Aye Aye, Sir!" Tanu had a bad feeling about this, but nothing had been right since that night on Desiri. He should have killed the prisoners and the camera crew. Things would be much brighter now.

Tanu made his way to the assault lock where he met his first officer, Rt. Hirandashi. She was a Chemice Gren and his most trusted confidant. She had been with him on three tours and they had saved each other's lives more times than he could remember. As he approached the lock he saw the crew assembled.

"We could have a simple repair job to do but it doesn't sound right. I want a fire team with each tech crew. Assuming there are survivors, they will be contained on board their vessel until we have a full understanding of the situation. Any questions?" Tanu saw Rgi. Jinny begin to speak but then stop herself. Humans were funny that way. He had an innate distrust of them since they had what appeared to be an uncontrollable streak of deception in them. Of course, that was a bonus in your supply raghi.

"Raghi, what is it?"

"Rahtari, will we be allowed salvage on this run?" Jinny was big for her race but her voice

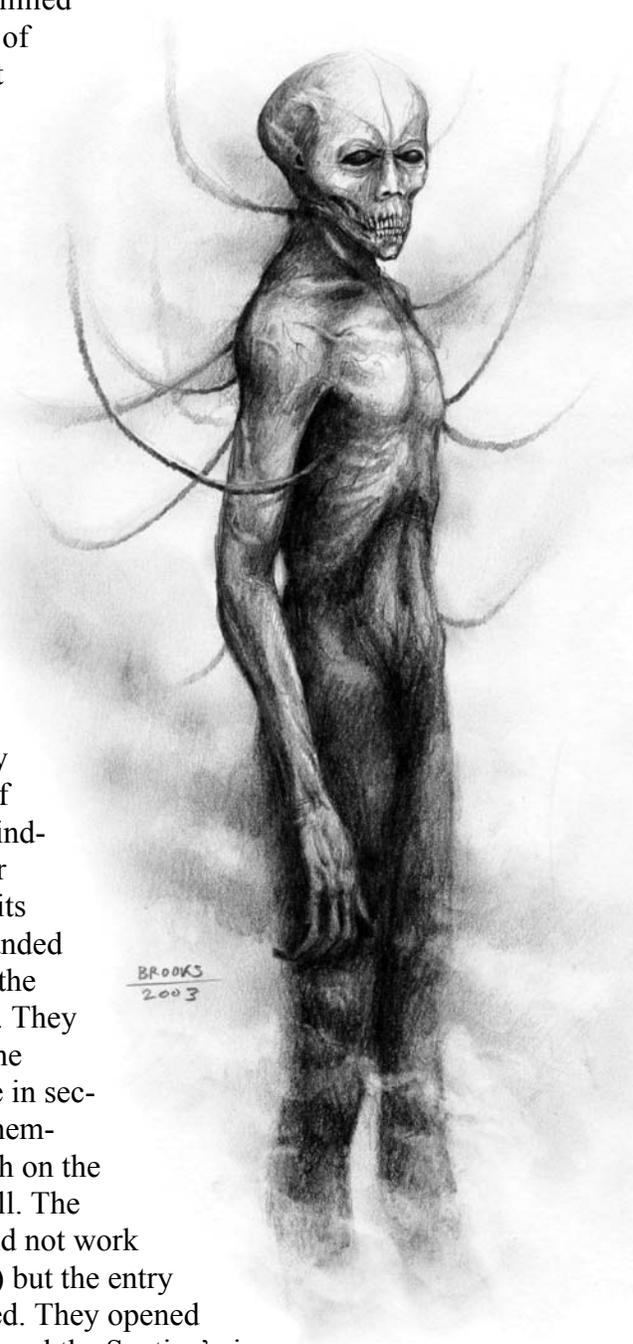
was small. It was supposedly a trait of her race but Tanu could never get over it. When Gren females spoke you heard them.

“This is a standard op on a corporate vehicle. No salvage, rescue and recovery only. Maybe next time Jinny.” His tail twitched showing his mirth. Jinny smiled back. Only years of conditioning kept him from taking offense. Baring teeth amongst Gren was akin to a slap in the face for humans. “Let’s load up. Prep and lock assembly in 15.”

Fifteen minutes to the second the teams were assembled. Two minutes later they heard the clank of the assault lock finding home. The air lock opened and its elastic sides expanded to accommodate the first assault team. They floated through the intervening space in seconds, attaching themselves to the hatch on the Santius’ outer hull. The standard codes did not work (they seldom did) but the entry team was prepared. They opened the hatch and entered the Santius’ air lock. After they declared the receiving bay

secure, Tanu and the rest of the company moved across.

The site that greeted them was grim. Three crewmen were splayed open and pinned to the wall. Raghi Jinny muttered into the comm circuit, “So much for mechanical failure.”



HISTORY

History is a very difficult thing to track with the Andromedaens. Due to their social structure, control of the historical texts have been maintained by the Redetta and later by the Andromedaen Council of Guilds. This was not only known but condoned by the general populace. The feeling was one of the leaders know best. Whatever history the leaders chose was certainly the best and more importantly, history was of no concern to the average individual. It was not until relations were normalized with other races were accurate records kept. It was historians from the other races that kept them though.

To this day, much of the history of the Andromedaens changes with administrations. It alternates between a utopian paradise and an abysmal hell depending on whether the ACG leadership

believes that the past or present should be worshipped. It is not of great concern to the Andromedaen citizen but it does worry many of the races that deal with the ACG.

Government

The ruling body of the Andromedaens is not elected by the people but by corporate share holders. All the shares of every corporation operated within the Andromedaen sphere of influence are counted. One share equals one vote. A board of directors is elected to manage the Andromedaen Council of Guilds. The most powerful of these is the Fon Teru, or Director.

The Fon Teru is elected by the board of directors from their own number to serve as an executive. It is the Fon Teru who commands during times of war, although it is the Board that declares war. The Fon Teru proposes a budget and the board reviews it, make changes and presents it back to him. The Fon Teru then makes his changes, presents it again, and it is either accepted or rejected. In this way the Fon Teru and the Board balance each other.

The Board is elected every six years and the Fon Teru every three years. During this time deals are spun to gain proxies of shares in corporations, and to an outsider the entire process appears corrupt. This would be true but for an independent regulatory committee called the Ral Hedard, or Fair Trade Committee. The Ral Hedard's only duty is to oversee the trade, issue and voting associated with corporate shares. Through this agency much of the corruption that would normally creep into the process is contained.

Another interesting influence on elections in particular (as well as the government in general) is family. The families represent a group of views close to but not exactly like a political party. A family is run by the eldest patriarch who does what he believes is right for the family and its clients. Some of the most influential Andromedaen families are detailed here.

The Darhood

The Darhood represent a family with ancient roots. They trace their lineage back to the Redetta, although that fact is occasionally suppressed. The Darhood is currently led by Rin Darhood, the director of InterStar. He is noted for his clear thought and ability to grasp a situation and all its effects in quick time. The Darhood represent the extreme conservative factions of the Andromedaen society. They favor the extermination of any race that threatens the Andromedaen way of life no matter how remotely. They also favor the reinstatement of the Andromedaen Regular Army, mandatory service for clients (poor Andromedaens) and the elimination of aliens in the military. They also favor the reinstatement of slavery for debtors.

The Rihali

The Rihali are a relatively new family having risen during the Second Millennium with the fortunes of Cybertech. The Rihali are currently led by Gos Rihali, a retired military Erondijar. He has made many friends and contacts amongst alien races. This sits poorly with other members of the ACG, who consider it in bad taste to associate with other races. The Rihali are perhaps the second strongest family only slightly behind the Darhood. Although these two families have conflicting viewpoints, they tend to avoid direct confrontations.

The Rihali favor the elimination of the laws banning aliens on Andromeda's surface. They are also in favor of more trade with alien markets, less government involvement in trade, and greater levels of social programs/reforms. As much as the Darhood represent the extreme conservatives the Rihali represent the extreme liberals of Andromedaen culture.

The Hadar

The Hadar are also one of the most ancient families. They proudly proclaim that their