

STARCRRAFT™

UPRISING

MICKY NEILSON



POCKET BOOKS

NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY SINGAPORE

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.



POCKET BOOKS, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.
1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020

Copyright © 2000 by Blizzard Entertainment

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form whatsoever. For information address Pocket Books, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020

ISBN: 0-7434-1898-0

First Pocket Books Ebooks Edition November 2000

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

POCKET and colophon are registered trademarks of Simon & Schuster, Inc.

Cover illustration by Roman Tenney

Visit us on the World Wide Web:
<http://www.SimonSays.com>

I would like to give my sincerest thanks and gratitude to the people who have been and continue to be instrumental in shaping my life: to my brothers, Sammy, Rider, Eric, and Tony. Thank you always.

To my love, Tiffany, thank you for being a pillar of strength.

A special thank you also goes out to: Chris Metzen, for his continued faith in my talent; to Allen Adham, Paul Sams and Mike Morhaim for their endless support; to Marco Palmieri at Pocket; and to all my co-workers, my friends, you know who you are. Thank you.

Finally, I would like to thank my father, Shihan Calvin Neilson, for always allowing me to exercise my imagination.

CHAPTER 1

THE SEEDS OF REBELLION

THROUGHOUT THE COURSE OF EVERY PERSON'S life, a large-scale catastrophe is certain to occur. At some point, fate will hand each of us the ultimate test: a tragedy so profound and so inescapable that it will forever alter the remaining course of the life affected. This event will have one of two outcomes. The man or woman confronted with the catastrophe may be defeated in the test, and live the remainder of their life as a shadow of the person they once were. Or a person might transform and become strengthened by their experience, transcending all self-imposed limitations and flourishing in a way they had never deemed possible.

Arcturus Mengsk was one such man. He had overcome a tragic event in his life, and now it had changed him, forever molded him into a being of single-minded purpose and unshakable determination. Lesser men

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

would have been broken by the tragedy. Lesser men would have just given up. But *lesser* men did not take their place in the proud annals of Terran history.

During his formative years, young Arcturus would often awake from dreams in which he had seen himself as a figure of importance, a preeminent leader of men. Mostly, Arcturus would dismiss the dreams as whims of an overactive imagination. In the waking world, Arcturus did not see himself as the leader-type at all. He didn't care about the affairs of others; he didn't care about the Confederacy. All he cared about was serving his time in the Confederate military and how much money he might be able to earn as a fringe-world prospector when that time was done. He had certainly done his duty, and, lack of desire to lead notwithstanding, had ascended to the rank of colonel before the climate changed; before he realized he was not fighting for what he believed in, and of course, before the tragedy.

Now, in the wake of the tragedy, things had changed. Arcturus's self-perception had changed; the man he once saw himself as seemed no more than a distant relative. Now Arcturus was on his way to becoming the man he was in his dreams.

For the most part, up until now, it had all been about preparation: keeping in constant communication with his colleagues in the underground network on Korhal (although they had become so vocal and overt as of late

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

that the term “underground” no longer applied); recruiting like-minded, eager civilians for training; and observing the actions of the Confederacy here among the relative safety of the Umojan Protectorate.

Preparation was well and good, and Arcturus prided himself on planning ahead. But he believed that the time had now come for action. Blowing up supply route bridges on key planets, hacking into Confederate mainframes and staging mine-worker revolts was all well and good, but the time had come to strengthen his numbers and to set out on his quest in earnest. The time had come to raise hell.

And so General Mengsk now stood looking into the determined eyes of the roughly twenty or so Umojan men before him. They were an able-bodied lot, though not as many as he had hoped for, and he was fairly certain that none of the men had ever seen combat. Still, they were capable, and they were willing to fight for what they believed in, and that’s where the seeds of rebellion truly began to germinate.

The general greeted each man’s eyes in turn. Once he was confident that he held their attention, he spoke. “You men are gathered here today because you share common beliefs and a common desire. Among the beliefs you share is the tenet that no man or body of government should have authority to treat you unjustly; the desire you share is the pursuit of independence.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Make no mistake men—these are the ideals that wars are made of. The least of the troubles that lie ahead for all of you is a life of forced seclusion, of being branded as secessionist by the very government that would impose her unfair laws upon you. The worst of what you may face—of what we all face—is death. Pollock and I and the rest of our fighters are, as you know, already considered turncoats by the Confederacy. . . .”

Arcturus motioned to a man standing at parade-rest to his left. Pollock Rimes was a man who looked the part of a battle veteran—his bald head and face were covered with scars, and the upper left hemisphere of his skull bore a slight indentation the size of a large man’s fist. His left ear was mostly missing and the bridge of his nose formed a backward S. Pollock’s eyes stared ahead blankly as Arcturus continued. “It is important that all of you go into this knowing that there exists a very real possibility that you may not live to see it through.”

As Arcturus allowed his words to sink in, his eyes fell on a man outside the room, visible through one of the large windows. The man, of Asian descent, wearing the clothes of a low-level prospector, seemed to be quite intrigued by what was going on inside. When the man looked up and saw Arcturus staring at him, he held the gaze for a second before looking away. He seemed to be wrestling with some kind of decision. Just then Arcturus heard the sound of one of the men clearing his throat.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

He turned to see a somewhat crazed-looking older man standing near the front of the group whose face bore a web of wrinkles and whose white tonsured hair circled his bald dome like wispy clouds hovering around a particularly worn mountain peak. “My mother, may she rest easy, used to say that there wan’t nothing worth living fer that wan’t worth dyin’ fer.”

Arcturus allowed himself a half-smile. “I see. And what might your name be, civilian?”

“I’m Forest Keel, and I seen my share o’ friction in the seven cycles I served in the Guild Wars.”

“I’m sure you did. And I’m sure you made your superiors proud.” Old Forest beamed a smile devoid of a few teeth as Arcturus’s eyes once again scanned the nearby window, where the prospector was still standing, nervously undetermined. Arcturus turned his attention back to the group. “Well men, the time has—”

Just then Arcturus was interrupted by the sound of an entryway opening. Looking to the far side of the room, the general saw Ailin Pasteur—one of the Protectorate’s ambassadors—stick his head in. The usually unflappable man looked pale and distressed.

“I’m sorry to interrupt, General, but there is a situation that requires your immediate attention.”



The Spy Deck was an area where mining foremen watched image-enhanced holograms of planets within

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

the system that might be fertile grounds for prospecting. For the enlistment of its current purpose, the Spy Deck could not have been more aptly named. Not long ago, Ailin Pasteur had served under the command of Arcturus's father, Angus. Angus had saved the man's life on one occasion and Ailin had repaid the favor by being one of the voting members of the Ruling Council that appointed Arcturus the rank of general, and leader of the revolution. The Council also allowed Mengsk to use the Protectorate as a base of operations, and to use the Spy Deck as a somewhat archaic means of surveillance. The imaging program contained detailed charts of all the planets within the known systems. It was also capable of charting the progress of freight ships carrying their valuable cargo through the trade routes in real-time—a primitive kind of “radar” system to be sure, but more than adequate for Arcturus's needs. It was here on the Spy Deck that the Ruling Council of the Umojan Protectorate stood, their haggard faces revealing collective concern.

Ailin turned to Arcturus and spoke in a halting voice: “We received an anonymous transmission suggesting that we keep an eye on this sector.”

Arcturus looked at the sector currently being displayed. He recognized the planet at the display's center immediately. “Korhal,” he said, to no one in particular.

The superintendent nodded slightly. Arcturus noticed

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

that the man was sweating heavily. “Yes.”

Several smaller objects that looked like orbiting satellites of some kind surrounded the image of the planet. Arcturus had an idea, even before the superintendent spoke, of what the objects really were.

“Battlecruisers,” Ailin confirmed. “We make out twenty of them. We’ve been monitoring the military channels and have overheard nothing that might explain this.”

“Nothing they’re willing to admit, anyway,” offered Mengsk. “But you can bet your bottom credit that the Confederates are the source of your anonymous tip. And if those ships are orbiting Korhal on Confederate orders, they mean to start trouble. Send an intelligence report to Achton immediately.”



In Korhal’s capital city of Styrling, Colonel Achton Feld—the elected leader of the rebel forces in the absence of General Mengsk—was busy shouting orders, standing atop a guardwalk at the city’s perimeter, the myriad antiair missile turrets that served as outer defenses forming a jagged outline on the horizon behind him. At one time, this fortress in the center of the city had been a Confederate post. That was before the revolution. Now it served as the rebel headquarters on Korhal.

The rebels had of course known about the presence of Confederate ships in their orbit, but their limited surveil-

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

lance systems had been unable to uncover what the recent intelligence transmission confirmed: that the orbiting ships numbered twenty—quite a number, especially with the capacity of each ship to hold hundreds of marines, dropships, siege tanks, even armored Goliaths. And those were just the ground forces. They were sure to be bombarded from the air first. But none of that mattered now. The rebels had spent almost a full cycle beefing up their anti-air defenses and had recruited enough of the planet's population to form an army that was more than just sizable—it was huge.

The confrontation with the Confederate forces was inevitable. And even now, in the midst of all the fear and the panic and the anticipation, Achton was glad. He was glad that the waiting was over and that the battle was about to begin. The Korhalians were about to send a message to the Confederates: that they were the citizens of a free planet, and that they would fight to ensure that freedom. *Let them come*, thought the Colonel, *let them bring their armored walkers and their cloaked fighters, but just let them come.*

Colonel Achton smiled and waited for the first dropships to appear.

★ ★ ★

The holo-image now showed several tiny objects, no more than minuscule dots. They came from the ships in swarms, like locusts, leaving the battlecruisers and

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

snaking their way toward Korhal's atmosphere.

"Dropships?" Ailin responded to the unasked question on everyone's mind. Mengsk shook his head. "No. Too small. They look more like . . . no, no that couldn't be, just could not—" Mengsk continued shaking his head, refusing to believe, because he knew that if he believed, that just might make it all the more real.

He watched with the others as the scores of tiny, luminescent dots began descending into Korhal's dense atmosphere.



Achton waited, looking out at the array of defenses beyond Styrling's walls. A lieutenant raced up onto the guardwalk, out of breath. He had the harried look of a man who suddenly wished he were somewhere else.

"Sir, we're tracking hundreds of incoming objects that have locked onto several positions across this side of the planet. I'm not sure, but I think we got a report from the Underside that they're tracking objects as well."

"Hundreds, you say?" The colonel's calm veneer was slipping, and the naked fear began to become apparent on his face.

"Yes, sir. Too small for us to identify just yet, but they're coming fast."

Just then the colonel heard a low hum, barely detectable, like the whine of a small insect. Then he looked to the horizon and saw a swarm of small objects

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

descending, trailing tails of smoke from behind, and he knew. "Not fair . . ." he whispered.

But the lieutenant did not hear him. The hum/whine had become almost deafening now. As the lieutenant looked up and saw more of the objects descending on them from directly above, he began to scream.

★ ★ ★

On the Spy Deck, a palpable silence pervaded as pools of brilliant light began spreading across the surface of the already luminescent image of Korhal. They continued from multiple locations until the majority of the planet was engulfed in that brilliance and no one in the room could question what they had just seen.

"By the fathers, it's gone . . . Korhal's gone. Everybody. Millions of people . . ." Ailin seemed on the verge of fainting.

Arcturus felt his stomach tighten and was aware of nothing but that image in front of him, the image of Korhal burning. After a short time, the pools of light began to fade, and the holo-image of Korhal became a darker, featureless facsimile of its former self.

In the midst of his shock and denial, Arcturus managed to speak three words: "Gather the men."

★ ★ ★

The case of Korhal was, like many others throughout history, an example of a government attempting to suppress upheaval among its populace through tyrannical

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

means and thereby only strengthening the determination of its dissenters. Inside the ready room where twenty men had stood just moments before, a throng of over fifty now crowded, exchanging angry and violent discourse over the loss of Korhal and the impudence of the Confederacy.

A hatchway slid open at the head of the room and Arcturus entered, looking like a lion that has stalked its prey into a corner and is savoring the moment just before the kill.

“You all know what has just transpired. For those of you who want the specifics—and I think you all deserve to know—twenty battlecruisers just launched about a thousand Apocalypse-class missiles from Korhal IV’s orbit. The missiles impacted on the planet’s surface and 35 million people will never again see the light of day. You need no stirring speeches; you need no coercion or coaxing. You all know the difference between right and wrong. Now the time has come to fight for the values you hold dear and to challenge those who would strip you of your individual freedoms. Are you with me?”

Fifty fists raised into the air simultaneously as the mob responded with a deafening roar. Mengsk waited for the din to subside before continuing. “As of this day, I declare that you are all no longer civilians. You are now soldiers. And we are now at war.” Mengsk prepared to go on, then stopped as a hatchway at the side of the

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

room opened, and the Asian prospector he had spotted outside earlier now stepped in. The crowd was silent. Mengsk's eyes traveled to the newcomer.

"I want to join," he said.

Mengsk approached the smaller man and stood before him, an intimidating presence.

"I saw you before. You seemed hesitant."

The Asian man nodded. "I wasn't sure yet. But I am now."

Somewhere among the crowd a mocking comment was made. A man near the general muttered "Fringe-squib" under his breath. The general silenced the man with a glance, then turned back to the Asian. "Indecision on the battlefield costs lives, boy."

The smaller man held the general's gaze. "Sir, all I'm asking is that you give me a chance."

"Will you follow orders without question?"

"I will."

Mengsk searched the other man's eyes for a moment, then finally nodded. "What's your name?"

"Somo. Somo Hung."

"Welcome aboard," said the general before he walked back to his spot next to Pollock and surveyed the men. "As I said, from now on . . . you are soldiers. And you will bear that mantle proudly. And as for the name of our little army, the name that shall be the bane of the Confederacy's existence, I think it only appropriate that

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

we call ourselves the Sons of Korhal!”

Once more the room erupted, this time with spirited cries of “Mengsk! Mengsk! Mengsk!”

★ ★ ★

Ailin stood next to the general, looking out into the docking bay where a battered, barely recognizable craft hung suspended. Workers pored over the behemoth busily, their torches spraying out sparks of light as final fittings and adjustments were made.

“She’s not exactly pristine, but she’ll serve her purpose,” Ailin offered, nodding his head toward the craft outside.

“That she will, my friend.” Arcturus was visibly pleased with the progress.

The battlecruiser was the casualty of a navigational systems error, much like the snafu that landed four supercarriers, carrying convicted criminals onto a few inhabitable worlds (including Umoja) into the deepest reaches of space just a few millennia ago. Those criminals were the forefathers of the Terrans, a blanket term that applied to all the generations of humans who followed and spread, inhabiting world after world and marching on in the way only humanity can.

The battlecruiser now in the docking bay had crashed onto a fiery planet not far from the Protectorate, but well out of range of the Confederacy’s hailing frequencies. Ailin and Mengsk went to the crash site immediately

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

and stripped the craft of its tracking beacon. In the cargo bay they found several SCVs as well as a fully operational siege tank, and in the launching bay they found two CF/A-17G Wraith fighters, as well as four dropships.

The Protectorate shepherded the cruiser into one of its many docking bays. The Confederacy was obviously angered by the loss of one of their ships, but without proof of the Protectorate's subversion, was unwilling to start another war. The crew was pronounced dead, and offered better pay and shorter hours to remain among the Protectorate and remain silent (a proposition no one balked at), and not too long after that the displaced ship's captain became Arcturus's most trusted soldier, Pollock Rimes.

It seemed like so much time had passed since then, though it was only a cycle. The craft had remained, being upgraded and modified slowly and methodically, until it became what Arcturus now saw before him, a battlecruiser he could call his own.

Ailin interrupted the general's thoughts briefly. "What would you like to call her?" he asked.

Mengsk thought for a long moment.

"Hyperion," he said at last. "I'll call her the *Hyperion*."

Just then Pollock approached the two men. "The soldiers request an update of status, General."

Arcturus turned his bright eyes to Pollock. "Tell them we set out at next interval."

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Pollock's lip lifted slightly, the closest thing to a smile Arcturus had ever seen cross the man's face.

"Yes, sir."

CHAPTER 2

THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

SARAH KERRIGAN WAS HAVING A NIGHTMARE. IN this nightmare, she spent seemingly endless intervals trapped in dark rooms, bound, with the feeling of unseen eyes watching her. From the darkness she would hear a noise, a moist smacking sound accompanied with slithering, the sound of a giant slug methodically traversing the tile floor. The sound could not be pinpointed. It seemed to come from all around her. Then she would feel something wet, something alive, crawling up her leg and then . . . the nightmare would start all over again.

Sarah awoke to find that she was living the nightmare.

She was in a small, dimly lit room with no visible doors, her hands and feet bound with metal shackles, in

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

a seated position. At the far end of the room she could barely make out a closed container with a hazard label affixed to it and beyond that, a large, dark pane of glass reflected her image back to her. Sarah knew that she was being watched from behind that glass. She was also vaguely aware of a sound from somewhere outside the room, the constant sound of rushing wind.

Her mind felt almost disconnected, her body sluggish and numb. She knew that she had been drugged, although she could not remember how she came to be in this place, or even what her name was. She began to fight the drug's effects. As she did so, she heard the sound of a door opening. As she watched, a small arm extended from an aperture above and behind the container. The arm slid into a ring on the container's top and lifted. There was a slight gushing sound of trapped air escaping. The arm then retracted back into the aperture and disappeared. A small door slid shut and the room was sealed once again.

There was a noise from the container then, as of a pocket of air escaping a vat of molasses.

As Sarah watched, a purplish, viscous blob rose to the top of the container and began spilling over its sides. It moved down the outside of the container in a way that seemed wholly unnatural, as if not being moved by gravity but rather as if the substance was moving itself, crawling onto the floor and spreading outward. Sarah

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

watched it creep up the wall behind the container and across the floor, endlessly proliferating. On the wall, as the substance reached and finally touched the glass, there was a quick hissing sound, like a drop of liquid touching an extremely hot surface. The substance began moving around the glass, framing it as it continued to cover the surrounding surface.

The creeping mass made its way inexorably across the floor. Sarah wanted to scream, but resisted. She kept telling herself that this was just all part of the nightmare and soon she would wake up at her . . . home? Sarah couldn't remember having a home, or even a life prior to being in this room, and that made the nightmare more real than ever.

As the material made its way to the lights on the ceiling, it moved across, and the already dim room grew even darker. The glob was translucent. The diffused, softened light silhouetted a host of veins and arteries inside the mass, pulsing with some form of life.

Sarah had begun to shiver as the substance made its way to within inches of her feet. She shook her head, willing with all her might for the substance to halt its progress, and much to her amazement and relief, it *did*. The material continued to slide across the walls and ceiling, now closing in the wall behind her, but it had stopped at her feet and simply sat there now, as if waiting.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Straining to turn her head, Sarah could see that the wall behind her was now fully covered. The creeping fungus was crawling up the sides of the metal chair she was bound to, and once again Sarah willed for the movement to cease, and once more, the effort was greeted with success.

Virtually the entire room was now covered, save for Sarah herself and the window across from her. A voice came from the room then, a masculine voice, muffled, being transmitted through some speakers somewhere that were, like everything else in the room, smothered in the mass.

“I want you to call the substance onto your arm, without speaking. Do it now.”

Sarah certainly did not want to do any such thing, but that was simply not an option. Her inability to refuse the order was more than just a conditioned response; it was somehow hard-wired into her mind that she could never, under any circumstances, refuse a direct order . . . *unless that order is issued by an enemy of the Confederacy*, her brain reminded her. She didn't know where that information had come from, or what exactly the Confederacy was. Neither did she know that the voice she heard was not that of an enemy of the Confederacy. But her drugged brain was in no condition to work out such reasoning, and so, Sarah complied and willed for the substance to touch her arm.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

It moved fast. Faster than its previous behavior indicated it was capable of moving. It wrapped around Sarah's arm and she could feel it, probing at her skin hungrily. . . .

She screamed then, and willed it to back away. It complied, and Sarah could see that she had willed it with such force that it pulled back as one, all around her.

Sarah felt a pricking in the back of her neck, and her vision began to fade as more drugs were administered to her system. Before long, Sarah Kerrigan drifted back to sleep and returned to her troubled dreams.



Inside the observation room, Doctor Flanx was busily notating the results of the experiment.

"I've never seen it move like that before," offered his assistant. "The way it reacted to her was amazing. Nothing like the interaction with the other telepaths." He was still looking out through the window at the slumped figure of Sarah in the chair. The alien substance had begun to close in on her once again.

The doctor did not look up from the screen as he typed: *Patient appears to have innate ability to interact with subject matter.* "Yep. Looks like the brass was right for once. Let's start the evacuation process."

The assistant nodded and pressed a button on the console before him. In the other room, beneath the mass, several red lights along the floor and walls suddenly illu-

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

minated. There was an audible hissing sound, and the substance began to retreat from the heat sources, being ushered back toward the safety of the container. No matter how many times the process was repeated, the assistant still marveled at the fact that the proliferating substance could spread from just a few tiny spores. The doctor pressed a button. A moment later a disc ejected from the console. He handed the disc to the assistant. "I want this sent underground for Lockston immediately, to be transmitted to Tarsonis."

The assistant nodded, then motioned toward the other room. "What's next for her?"

The doctor sighed. "We'll move her up to the next stage, see how she interacts with the larvae. Until then keep her drugged."

The assistant nodded, watching as the final remains of the Creep, as the scientists had come to call it, disappeared back into the container.



The *Hyperion* was moving steadily through Protected Space, on the Umojan side.

Inside the cargo bay, Forest Keel was learning how to operate a siege tank. The old man sat inside the metal behemoth, the control panel lights bathing his smiling face in an array of primary colors. One of Mengsk's officers, Sela Brock, sat in the vehicle's rear, educating Forest on the tank's finer points in her sultry, almost

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

hypnotic voice.

“The Arclite siege tank is a dual purpose vehicle,” she explained. “Once a forward unit has reached an optimal position for insertion—” Forest chuckled somewhat at this comment; Sela either did not notice or chose to ignore the infraction and continued “—the tank can be transformed into siege mode, where it will provide cover artillery fire with the 120mm shock cannon.”

Forest rubbed the palms of his hands together in eager anticipation. “You just show me which button to push, little lady.”

Sela sighed and moved forward to show Forest how to transform the tank.



In the mess hall, Somo Hung sat alone. He had become used to isolation, having grown up in the outer limits of what was called the Fringe Worlds, a belt at the farthest reaches of the galaxy’s inhabitable planets.

Fringe Worlders for the most part were considered to be ignorant, expendable sources of cheap labor. The Fringes offered the hardest work for the cheapest pay, though the work was steady. Those who settled the outer ring kept mostly to themselves. Some of the Fringe workers had begun reviving forgotten religions, and some had created new religions that enjoyed a following that sometimes bordered on the fanatical.

Somo’s parents had never been caught up in the new

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

religions or the old, and though they had sacrificed education for stability, they had never wished the same fate on their only son. And so they saved their credits, and when Somo reached his eighteenth cycle, they paid for him to be transported to Umoja, a bustling mecca of opportunity.

And there he stayed. He taught himself to read, and began collecting Digi-tomes on everything from philosophy and poetry to the recorded histories of several of the key planets. Two cycles later an outbreak of cholera ended a score of lives on his home planet, including that of his mother and father. But still Somo pressed on, in their memory, bearing the burden of their loss in silence and striving to become the man they would have wished him to be.

Just now Somo was reading his favorite Digi-tome, the *History of the Guild Wars*. He was aware of the whisperings from the nearby tables. At one table in particular, a group of warp-rats sat staring. Warp-rats were the engineers who maintained the warp drives that were standard on all space-faring craft.

Somo tried to ignore the large, bald engineers whose intent gazes were growing more and more persistent by the moment. It wasn't long before the largest of the men shouted: "Who you tryin' to impress, Fringe-squib? We all know you can't read." The other men at the table snickered. Somo looked up and offered a brief smile

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

before returning to his book.

The leader of the men, bolstered by the others' reactions, stood up and approached Somo's table. "Hey there squib, I'm just tryin' to make friendly conversation, and you're ignoring me. That's not polite."

Somo turned in his seat, facing his back to the man, and continued reading. The larger man then snatched the tome out of Somo's hands and flung it at the nearest wall. Somo stood, his face red, his lips pressed together.

"Whatcha gonna do, squib?" the other man said through clenched teeth as he stepped closer.

The moment was then interrupted by a low, somewhat hoarse voice that said, "Any man who causes trouble will forfeit half of his period stipend." The men turned to see Pollock Rimes. He approached slowly, his hands clasped behind his back. "What's the cause of this disturbance?" Pollock stopped, his patchwork face very close, eyeing each man in turn.

"This squib's the one causing the trouble, sir." The large man looked back at his cronies, who began nodding adamantly. "Yep, Fringe-World trash is all he is," voiced one of the men. Pollock leaned close to Somo, studying his eyes. "If I catch you being insubordinate, Private, I'll see to your discipline personally."

Somo stared back. "I didn't make trouble. They wanted to make trouble, not me."

"You'll find no sympathy here, squib," Pollock replied.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

He smiled, revealing a field of crooked teeth. “Now double-time it to the cargo bay. It’s time to begin your instruction on the proper use and maintenance of your CMC 400 powered combat suit.”

Somo nodded, looked back at the remains of the Digi-tome, and left.

“Thank you, sir,” offered the engineer. Pollock turned to the large man, facing him at eye level. “Return to your seat, warp-rat.” The man emitted a small laugh to indicate that he knew the lieutenant was joking. The lieutenant’s steady gaze indicated that he was not. The warp-rat returned to his seat.



The next few intervals passed without incident. The forty-six new recruits in General Mengsk’s army were all trained in the use of marine-issue combat suits, gauss rifles, and basic military protocol. The men, who had clearly signed on for action, soon began to grow restless and wondered when they would strike a blow to the Confederacy.

The mess hall became more of a gambling hall, where credits were won and lost and then won again (Somo was never invited to these games, nor did he wish to attend). Forest Keel became well versed in the operation of the siege tank, although he had no idea when that knowledge would prove useful. Mengsk, during this period, was nowhere to be seen, and as a result, his leg-

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

end grew. Whisperings and rumors abounded that Mengsk was a recluse, that he spent his time in meditation, or that he simply didn't care (at one point a rumor began that the general had been stricken with a debilitating disease and didn't have much time left among the living).

Finally, mercifully, much to the delight of the new recruits (and the relief of the alarmists), the general called for a briefing.

The briefing was held in the main cargo bay, where an expansive area had been cleared, and a holo-projection system had been set up. The forty-six new recruits as well as roughly thirty of Mengsk's original troops waited nervously for the arrival of their fearless leader. Sela Brock stood impassively near the projection system. Before long, a metallic droning sound was heard as the cargo bay lift arrived. Sela called attention. The lift doors opened, and Pollock Rimes stepped out, followed by Arcturus Mengsk.

The general walked to a spot near the projector and nodded to Sela as Pollock stepped up and assumed a position to Mengsk's right. The lights in the bay were dimmed, and the holo-projector came to life, emitting a glowing image of a small rotating planet.

"Rest easy," Pollock ordered. The men went from attention to a resting position and waited in silence for Arcturus to begin speaking.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

“Men,” he began, “Umojan intelligence sources have recently provided us with the necessary information to deal our first substantial blow to a key target in the Confederate empire.” There was a murmur of excitement. “At ease,” Pollock barked. The murmuring ceased and Mengsk continued: “Our target is on the planet Vyctor 5 in the Koprulu system.” Mengsk motioned toward the image. “As some of you may know, Vyctor 5 is renowned for a particular feature on its desert surface: a weather anomaly unlike any other previously recorded in the known systems.” Mengsk turned to the glowing planet, and nodded once again to Sela. “Bring us closer.”

The edges of the planet began to fade out as the program zoomed in on the desert surface and now the assembly was treated to a first-person view, skimming along the planet’s relatively flat surface until a massively tall, rotating windstorm appeared on the horizon.

“It is known as the Fujita Pinnacle—a complex mass of conflicting pressure systems and staggering updrafts that have created what is, in simple terms, a stationary, volatile vortex of immense size and unlimited life. It is four leagues wide and over twenty high. To give you a rough idea, its diameter is that of two battlecruisers placed end-to-end, and its height is twice that of the tallest superstructure on Tarsonis.”

There was silence among the men as Mengsk stood in

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

front of the swirling column of light. “Long ago, before the Guild Wars, a research center was built in the eye of the tempest, to study it.” The perspective of the holo-image changed once more, moving through the cyclone winds of the anomaly, into its center, where a sprawling complex of structures were seen to rest on the sandy floor.

“That facility has since been taken over by the Confederacy and, we have just learned, is being used by them for some highly secretive experiments. We have arranged for a falsified message to be sent to a detachment of marines at the Fujita facility, informing them of a change in their rotation. They are expecting to be replaced at the end of this cycle, so they have already alerted sector patrol to be on the lookout for a carrier—our carrier. I believe the marines will be excited enough about the transfer that they will not question its authenticity and we should have little trouble getting to the planet. That, however, is only the first step. The marines will be expecting their replacements to come to them via underground transit. . . .”

One of the men near the front, a Private Saunders from Umoja blurted out: “I’ve been to Vyctor 5. The transit’s terminal has more guards than the Council headquarters on Tarsonis!” Some of the more experienced members of Mengsk’s militia, who had already learned not to interrupt the general during his briefings, threw the man derisive stares but remained silent.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Mengsk acknowledged the man briefly with a flat gaze, and then returned to the image. “The facility is supplied via underground transit systems that run from the closest city, Lockston, fifty leagues away. To attack the city, as our friend so aptly pointed out, would be too risky. To try and break into the underground tunnels from the desert would be too difficult and time consuming. So . . . we will breach the facility’s defenses from above, with a squadron of four dropships led by a Wraith fighter. Two of the dropships will carry armed forces, while the other two will bring back any civilians we run across, or any Confederates who wish to surrender.”

New recruits, Somo thought.

“One aspect of the anomaly that works in our favor is that it blocks virtually all ground-based surveillance, scanning and transmissions. They won’t even know we’re there until we’re on top of them.”

The image moved outside the column once more, then up. Once at the top the angle tilted down and the view was from above the windstorm, looking down its winding tunnel at the structures below. “The facility’s defenses, due to its already formidable location, are minimal. There are four missile turrets around the facility’s perimeter to discourage an attack from above.” The perspective moved forward, down the wind tunnel, leveling out at the bottom and circling to provide a view of the four turrets.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

“The turrets must be taken out before the airdrop can take place. Like I said, although they are expecting our carrier, they are expecting it at Lockston, not the facility. Those turrets will be live, and will fire on anything that comes down the funnel. The only way to get past them is to sabotage them from the ground.”

Another private, a dark-skinned man named Tibbs asked, “How do we get to the turrets without going through that storm?”

Mengsk waited patiently for a moment before answering. “We don’t. That’s where Sergeant Keel comes in. He’s going to take four soldiers with him, and he’s going to drive a siege tank right through the Pinnacle’s outer barrier and into the belly of the beast.”

There was a stunned silence among the assembly, and many eyes turned to Forest. He simply beamed a smile back, although he had no idea how he was going to get through the tempest, and until now, hadn’t even known he was a sergeant.

Another private managed to stammer out, “But with the force of those winds . . . that’s impossible.”

Mengsk sighed. It was obvious that Pollock would have to have a discussion with the “newbies” about briefing protocol. In the meantime, he told Sela to bring the lights back up and proceeded to explain exactly how Forest Keel and four of his companions were going to achieve the impossible.

CHAPTER 3

INTO THE EYE OF THE STORM

ARCTURUS HAD TO EXPLAIN THE CONCEPT TO Forest three times, and Forest still didn't really understand it, but it went something like this: the problem was that once the tank reached the hurricane winds of the Pinnacle, it would be swept up into the air and hurled across the wastes like some child's toy if it was not somehow "rooted" to the ground. The solution lay in the fact that, long ago, even before the landing of the forefathers on the inhabitable planets, mankind's technology had advanced to a point where it could simulate and control gravity. The same technology that was used on battlecruisers to create artificial gravity was used to a smaller degree in combat suits and in siege tanks, to allow for their use on orbiting platforms—although most platforms had their own version of the gravity technology, to have a platform's power supplies fail and subse-

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

quently allow a tank to float out into space simply would not do. Therefore, tanks, marine combat suits, Goliath walkers, and Vulture cycles all had accelerator technology in place.

So the siege tank that Forest Keel now piloted across the arid wastes of Vyctor 5 carried modified accelerators that would, with the press of a button, increase the downward G-forces of the tank to six times normal; the inside of the tank, much like a pressurized cabin, would remain unaffected.

This particular technique had never been tested in field conditions before to anyone's knowledge, and Somo and the others were not exactly thrilled to be the pioneers of its inception, but, as Mengsk had explained, their options were limited and time was a factor.

Intercepted Confederate transmissions indicated that in just under an interval a *Mammoth*-class carrier—a real Confederate carrier—was due to arrive on the planet. It would proceed to Lockston, but to get to Lockston it would pass through the outer orbit where the *Hyperion* now waited. The Confederate carrier was certain to be escorted by several fighters, and perhaps even a battlecruiser, and so it was imperative that Mengsk's operatives slip in and out as quickly as possible.

Entering Confederate space had been fairly easy. Umojan operatives were masters at pilfering both military and commercial passage codes. The Sector Patrol for

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Vyctor 5 was expecting the *Hyperion*, and remarked that they must be the cause of the cancellation of the massive tour ship that had been scheduled to visit the Pinnacle until just a few intervals ago. Mengsk, of course, had known of the cancellation and its purpose: the canceled tour coincided with the legitimate carrier's arrival. The Confederacy didn't like civilians snooping around when they were going about their shady business.

The tank had been dropped several leagues away from the Pinnacle, just beyond the restricted area warning markers, and just inside the elevated Lookout Plateau where the people of Lockston and other visitors could rent telescopic sights to view the anomaly. On ground level the Pinnacle was not yet visible past the rolling dunes. Old Forest wondered if civilians at the lookout had noticed the dropship, or if they noticed the tank as it now rolled toward its destination, then figured that most people who paid to view the Pinnacle would not bother with inspecting the trackless desert surrounding it, and even if they did see the tank they probably wouldn't care; or if they did care, by the time they finally got around to reporting it and the squadrons at Lockston acted, it would be too late. Forest then decided that he was thinking too much and decided to concentrate on the situation at hand.

On the interior vidscreen, Forest watched the horizon through his combat suit face shield. Just now the tank

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

had begun to encounter several small cresting hills, and the journey soon began to simulate the effects of being on a vessel at sea. As the small dunes grew larger, Somo suddenly felt that he might be sick. He closed his eyes and concentrated, then glanced around at the others. They didn't seem to be faring much better, except for Pollock of course, who simply returned Somo's glance with a cold stare. Somo's condition was not helped by the fact that the tank was incredibly hot, despite the cooling unit inside the suit. And to add to the discomfort, the space inside the tank was cramped and claustrophobic. Somo wasn't sure exactly how many personnel the tank was made to accommodate, but he was fairly sure it wasn't five. At least not five fully suited.

The dunes continued to grow in size, and at each crest and downward descent, Somo felt more sure that he would vomit, until, mercifully, the tank would level out. Then before long, it would begin another upward climb. After several of these, Forest finally stopped on the crest of a particularly large dune.

"I'll be a swampbat's uncle," the old man said. There was a touch of awe in his voice that made Somo and the others crowd forward to share a look at the forward vid-screen. Only Pollock remained seated.

What they saw looked like a solid towering pillar of sand rising up and up and finally disappearing into the

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

open sky. It was possible to note a certain amount of movement in the funnel, but from here it looked as if the winds were moving in slow motion, like a video recording being played at half speed. There was an immense cloud of dust at the Pinnacle's base that roiled and shifted like a nest of angry hornets.

"Enough gawking. Let's move," Pollock ordered.

Somo and the others sat back down. There was a tickling sensation in Somo's stomach that he was not used to. He took several deep breaths and told himself to remain calm. *Everything's going to be just fine*, he thought. *No problem*. There was a lurch as Forest engaged the forward drive and the tank began descending the large dune.

★ ★ ★

Sela stood on the bridge of the *Hyperion* looking over General Mengsk's shoulder at a spy screen that displayed a large red dot, and not too far below it, a small green dot. She was wearing her flight suit and had her piloting helmet tucked under one arm. The green dot on the screen stopped briefly, and then began to move again, toward the red.

Mengsk sat with his chin resting on his closed fists, watching intently.

"All right, lieutenant," he said finally. "Prepare to drop."

★ ★ ★

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Sarah Kerrigan was reliving the nightmare. This time it was just a little different: a glowing red line cleanly bisected the dark room, keeping the purplish substance at bay on the other side. Wherever the shifting mass would touch the heat source, it would retract instantly. As before, Sarah was bound, facing a dark window. She was still groggy from the latest dose of drugs, and had grown emaciated and sickly.

Below the window across from her and to one side, Kerrigan noted an opening. She had not noticed it upon waking, and now that she looked closer she could see that the mass extended into the depths of the aperture. She heard a sound coming from the hole then, a sticky, wet noise; almost a sucking noise, like someone trying to free a foot that has been stuck in mud.

The sound was becoming louder, more insistent, and it became obvious that whatever was making the noise would soon be in the room with her.

Sarah still believed that there was a chance she was dreaming, and that before the thing in the hole entered the room, she would wake up.

Then the creature emerged.

★ ★ ★

They were past the rippling dunes now. The area just outside the tempest was in fact so perfectly level that it almost seemed unnatural. All of the loose sand in the area had long since been swept into the storm and what

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

remained was hard-packed ground, layered with spider-web cracks. The wind was intense, and Somo could hear it buffeting against the tank's armor even through his combat suit helmet.

"We're within two leagues," Forest informed the others.

The tickling sensation in Somo's stomach was gone. Mostly what Somo felt now was a kind of detached disbelief; disbelief that he was playing at being a soldier, disbelief that he had come so far on his own, and disbelief that he was about to enter a raging tempest in the name of the rebellion.

As these thoughts traveled through his mind, he felt the tank begin to slow, heard the sound of the engine ramping up, working harder to push through the wind, and wondered if the vehicle was powerful enough to even get them to the storm's outer barrier.

"We're under one league," Forest croaked. The wind was making it increasingly difficult to hear, and when Pollock spoke, he had raised his voice to be heard over it.

Pollock looked to Forest, who was waiting for the order, and nodded. "All right, time to get heavy."

Forest activated the gravity accelerator and the tank began to crawl, moving at an agonizingly slow pace.

Seemingly an eternity later, tiny flecks of sand could be heard pelting the tank's outer armor, and Somo realized as he looked over at the monitor that they had

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

reached the sandstorm at the tempest's base.

For a long time, no one spoke. They sat there listening; to the wind punishing the tank's outer shell; to the impact sounds of the gritty sand like a constant rainfall; and to the now high-pitched, persistent drone of the overworked engine.

After another infinite stretch of time, Forest's voice was heard once again. "We're just now at the outer perimeter. Engine's in the red. I don't know how much more it's gonna take."

Pollock shot Forest a withering glance. "I didn't know you were an authority on siege tank engines. Continue ahead full." Pollock's voice was breaking up, even in the interior suit mikes. Somo knew that pretty soon, when they were inside the funnel, their transmitters would not work at all.

"Aaallrighty," muttered Forest as he turned back to panel. "Here goes the farm." The tank then lumbered through the outer barrier and into the Fujita Pinnacle.

★ ★ ★

Arcturus Mengsk sat watching a timer on his console. He then thumbed a button on his lapel and spoke into a collar mike. "They should be in now, lieutenant. Proceed with insertion."

"Roger that, sir," returned Sela's sultry voice.

Arcturus leaned back and closed his eyes. *This is where it truly begins*, he thought. They would soon learn what-

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

ever secret the Confederacy was hiding, and, most importantly, they would embark upon the road to revenge. And then, maybe at long last, there would be atonement for his life's catastrophe.



The creature appeared to be some kind of insect. It had a segmented, multilegged body that trailed a mucous-like substance behind it. It crawled forward on its tiny legs, shimmying like a snake, its tail section creating the sticking/sucking noises that Sarah had previously heard. It moved to the edge of the purple mass, and then stopped as two small antennae on its head probed the empty air. The creature wriggled to a position just in front of Sarah, maneuvering to face her. It rose up onto its hind section until it had reached a height that was on Kerrigan's eye level. Its tiny legs moved back and forth as the creature inclined its head slightly.

Sarah stared into the creature's multifaceted eyes. There was a mutual, unspoken recognition that Kerrigan did not understand. She wasn't sure but it seemed as if the creature was waiting . . . the way a foot soldier would wait to be given an order.



Inside the observation room, Doctor Flanx was stunned. He began typing feverishly. The assistant was watching the scene in the opposite room with an open mouth.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

“Well, I’d say it’s clear that there is some kind of communication taking place,” he offered. The doctor nodded, then looked back into the room. The larva was waiting there, sitting in front of the patient like a pet begging for food. It was truly amazing.

“Now what?” asked the assistant.

The doctor shrugged. “I don’t really know. . . .” It was clear that telepaths, and especially this patient in particular, had an effect on the alien species. But could she control it? “We’ll see if she can give it orders,” the doctor finally replied.



Forest, Somo, and the others were inside the vortex making their way slowly toward the inner wall. The vehicle had tilted slightly as the side facing the wind was lifted, and at some point something (hopefully nonessential) had been ripped from the tank’s top and was carried away into the maelstrom. The sound in the funnel was a constant, almost deafening roar. Somo was quite sure that had he not been wearing the helmet he would be forced to plug his ears.

The progress seemed almost nonexistent to those inside, but they were, at least, moving forward. The engine had now developed a disconcerting rattling noise from somewhere deep inside, but Pollock and the others knew that they were close to making it into the storm’s eye.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Somo had glanced at the monitor in front of Forest on several occasions, but the view never really changed. All the monitor showed was a blur of sand. But now, as Somo watched, he actually believed he could make out the first structures of the Fujita facility.

It was like coming upon a landmass in the midst of a dense fog. The facility and its outlying constructions were just dark masses glimpsed through the sandy wall, but, as Somo watched, they became clearer and clearer until finally, he could make out more details such as antennae and dishes. The roar of the funnel *moved* then, working its way back as the tank emerged into the storm's center. Then, the noise was simply gone, replaced by what sounded like nothing more than a strong wind.

As the tank rolled to a stop Pollock gave the hand signal to move out.

Somo was the first one out of the tank. He vaulted to the ground, stumbled a few feet, and hit the visor button for his helmet. (They had been informed during the briefing that Vyctor 5's air was breathable. The suits were to protect against human enemies, not the atmosphere.) He felt heat in his throat, and then his stomach tightened and he doubled over, vomiting his last two meals. He wiped at his mouth, then looked up, and froze.

Behind the facility the Pinnacle was a counterclock-

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

wise rotating wall of sand. Somo could hear the furious winds now, but it was muted somehow, not nearly the same as on the outside. Somo turned slightly, following the blur of the inner wall until he saw where the tank had come through. Then he looked up, and became instantly dizzy, and thought he might puke again. It was like being inside a living, raging tower.

Pollock grabbed Somo by the arm and spun him around. "You'd better wake your dimwitted ass up!" he yelled. "Pick up your weapon and start firing at that turret!"

The plan was to take out all of the four anti-air missile turrets. The closest one was just a few strides in front of the tank. The foot soldiers would take care of that one, but it would take some time. The other three, however, could be taken out in one shot each with the shock cannon. Luckily, the siege tank's targeting computer keyed in on heat sources, and therefore was not affected by the Pinnacle's dampening effects. Forest's fingers danced across the control panel nimbly. He felt a shifting underneath him as the tank's support legs extended. The entire vehicle then rose up slightly, and a moment later a light flashed indicating that the tank was now in siege mode. *Well, color me giddy!* Forest thought as he put on his ear protection and targeted the first turret.

★ ★ ★

A voice, the same voice that had told Sarah to invite

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

the mess onto her arm in a previous nightmare now told her to order the maggot-thing to move back across the room. This order Sarah had no problem complying with, since the proximity of the creature repulsed her. She was in the midst of sending the thought when her concentration was interrupted by what sounded like . . . gunfire. The gunfire was followed by a blast that caused the ground to shake. Somewhere an alarm was sounding. Sarah wondered what was happening, then realized as she looked to the far side of the room that the creature had complied. Somehow, the thing understood her. Even in the midst of her delirium Sarah knew that this was significant, that some kind of unexplainable connection had been established.

There was more gunfire then, and an explosion. Sarah felt a stabbing at the base of her neck, and heat, and then nothing as the world faded away.

★ ★ ★

Doctor Flanx had just told Sarah to command the insect away when the gunfire began outside. Shortly following the gunfire, a perimeter alarm sounded. The assistant had turned white as snow and looked at the doctor in a detached, lost kind of way.

"I think we're being attacked," he managed. The doctor looked back into the room where the subject was being held. He saw that the creature had obeyed the subject's command. *Not now*, he thought. *We can't be under*

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

attack now. There was a ground-shaking explosion then. The doctor pressed a console button and the patient in the other room was knocked out. The assistant was standing frozen, staring dumbly at the wall where the sounds were coming from.

“What do we do? What the hell do we do?” he stammered, and then looked to the doctor.

“Stay calm. We’re just going to wait here. Remember, we have an entire marine detachment to protect us.”

“Yeah . . . yeah. That’s right.” The assistant smiled and wiped sweat from his forehead. “We’re gonna be just fine.”

★ ★ ★

The support legs were designed to absorb the recoil of the cannon, but the force of it was intense nonetheless. The entire tank had jarred dramatically when the shock cannon fired, and Forest, who had not strapped in to his seat, was in the process of picking himself up from the floor. He returned to his seat somewhat dazed, harnessed himself in, and prepared to continue firing.

★ ★ ★

The Wraith CF/A-17G fighter had led its entourage of four dropships through Vycor 5’s atmosphere and was now hovering far above the Fujita Pinnacle. Sela sat in the pilot’s seat, and canted the craft so that she could look down at the spectacle through her canopy window. It was breathtaking, and even this high up she could feel

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

the turbulence it created. She looked down at her computer readout, which was set to key in on heat signatures. There were four red dots representing the missile turrets, and one of them now blinked out. Sela smiled. Then, another of the dots faded. *Two to go*, Sela thought, and then returned her eyes to the beauty of the Pinnacle as she waited for the last two turrets to be destroyed.



Gunnery Sergeant Mitch Tanner had almost cried when he received the Vycor 5 duty assignment. The last thing he wanted to do was baby-sit the science geeks while they did whatever top-secret crap they were supposed to do. He knew the experiments involved some kind of newly discovered, buglike aliens, but beyond that, he really didn't care. The aliens didn't carry guns, and hadn't seemed to want to put up a fight yet, so they were about as exciting as pulling fire-watch duty in the frozen wastes of Saluset. And the geeks weren't much better; they didn't drink, and they didn't gamble, so what good were they? The Pinnacle was neat to look at . . . for a while. The novelty wore off after the first planetary month. Mitch had cleaned his weapon and combat suit so many times he could do it in his sleep. He knew that the men were just as bored as he was, but they had made the best of it, and now they had finally gotten the good news that replacements were coming, and Mitch and his Gamma Squadron could go back to

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

forcibly settling claim disputes and ridding the miners' daughters of their pesky virginity.

Mitch was in the middle of cleaning his suit . . . again, and working on a decent buzz with the aid of a bottle of Scotty Bolger's Old No. 8 Whiskey—Tarsonis' finest, when he heard what sounded strangely like . . . gunfire. Mitch bolted up in his seat, and listened harder. It *was* gunfire. A dispute among the men, maybe? A drunken argument carried to the extreme? Too many mother jokes? *Could be . . .* Mitch thought, and then he heard the perimeter alarm. *By the fathers, we're being attacked!* Mitch thought now as he started suiting up. He wondered just how in the known systems anyone could have made it through the Pinnacle. They couldn't have come in from above, or he would have heard the turrets firing. There was a massive blast then, what sounded incredibly like a siege tank firing. *They're taking out the turrets*, he thought. That meant that this was the real thing; they were in it, deep. If they were blasting the turrets, they meant to bring in air support. Just then there was an explosion, different from the first blast, and the gunfire stopped momentarily. *They took out one of the turrets with small arms*, Mitch thought. *That means there's two left.*

And I thought this would be a boring assignment, Mitch thought as he finished suiting up and reached for his gauss rifle.

★ ★ ★

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Outside, Pollock and the others had finally destroyed the closest turret. Forest targeted the third, and fired. The tank rocked. On the targeting computer, the dot representing the third turret disappeared. *I hope the fat lady's warmed up and ready to crow*, Forest thought as he targeted the last turret on the facility's far side. There was a buzzing sound. Forest frowned, looking at the bottom of the screen where a red warning had appeared. *Target out of range*, it read. Well, that was no problem. Forest would just take the tank out of siege mode and drive it around the perimeter until it was in range.

The tank lowered slightly, and Forest could hear the support legs retracting. He put the tank in forward, and accelerated . . . and nothing happened. The rattling noise in the engine had now returned, and was significantly louder. Then whatever was making the noise came loose with a loud pop, ricocheted off of something else, and the engine died completely.

Forest removed his hearing protection and popped the top hatch on the tank. Pollock, standing near the remains of the turret they had sabotaged with rifle fire, looked over questioningly. Forest pointed down at the tank and made a swiping motion across his neck with his right hand. Pollock nodded, and called Somo and the others to his position.

★ ★ ★

Something is wrong, Sela thought as she waited for the

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

last dot on her screen to fade out. They should have destroyed the last turret by now. The dot representing the tank had not moved. It was possible that it had become incapacitated. Sela decided to contact Mengsk.

“Sir, the last turret is still in place. Please advise.”

Mengsk’s voice came through the mike. “We’re running out of time, lieutenant. That carrier is on its way, and it has a battlecruiser escort. If the last turret isn’t down in five ticks, I want you to proceed and destroy the target with your burst lasers. Your shield should hold up. No matter what, those dropships must land, and soon. We still have a marine detachment to worry about.”

“Roger that, sir.” Sela waited, wishing for the dot to disappear. She really didn’t relish the thought of heading into the Pinnacle with one turret still active.

“All dropships, be advised, we move in five.” *One way or the other*, Sela thought as she looked back down at her screen.

The dot was still there.

★ ★ ★

Pollock had called the men to his position, raised his visor and told them that the tank was out of range to hit the last turret, and that it was immobilized by some kind of engine failure. So the men would have to make their way to the opposite side of the facility and use their gauss rifles to destroy the remaining turret.

“Be aware that we should be seeing enemy resistance

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

shortly," Pollock yelled as he and the others trotted around the facility's northeast side. Somo knew what "enemy resistance" meant; it meant an entire detachment of Confederate marines, at least twenty-five of them. Math had never been Somo's strongest point, but he knew without a doubt that twenty-five against four were not good odds.

★ ★ ★

Gunnery Sergeant Tanner and his men had exited the barracks and seen the remains of the turret on the facility's southern side. It was completely destroyed. He could not see the other turrets from his current position, but he remembered the explosions he had heard from his quarters; the only direction he had *not* yet heard an explosion from was the northeast side, and so he led his men around the facility's power generators and was rewarded with the sight of an undamaged, fully operational missile turret.

He and his men took a position in front of the turret, and a few seconds later they saw a combat-helmeted head peer out from behind the South Lab.

★ ★ ★

Pollock and the others were pinned down, the tank was useless, and the enemy had taken a position around the last turret. A barrage of suppressing fire was now pelting the structure Somo and the others were taking cover behind. Somo wondered just how they might get

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

out of this predicament when suddenly the whole environment darkened.

There wasn't much light inside the funnel anyway, but when the Wraith fighter and four dropships appeared at the funnel's top, it had the effect of eclipsing what little light there was. Somo peered up and watched the craft descend. Once they reached the funnel's halfway point, the turret came to life. The Wraith positioned itself to take the entirety of the barrage of automatic missile fire. Bright coronas erupted around the fighter as several missiles struck the outer shields. There were smaller impacts as well, and Somo realized that the marines must have begun firing at the fighter . . . but at least that meant the marines were distracted.

"Let's lay it down! Now!" Pollock yelled as he took a kneeling position and began firing. The dropships had almost reached the ground behind Somo's position and out of the line of the marines' fire. Somo knew the Wraith would not take much more punishment, and the turret needed to be destroyed before they could leave. He leaned out, watching as clouds of whitish back-blast smoke from the rapid-fire missiles engulfed the marines.

Somo lifted his weapon to fire, and stopped. He had never shot at another human being before, and he hesitated. The others had begun firing now, and Somo watched as some of the marines fell, and others began returning fire. Somo ducked back behind the structure.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Pollock stood and smacked the side of Somo's helmet.

"You'd better lay down some fire before I toss your worthless ass into this storm!" he yelled. Somo nodded then, and made the decision that his desire to live outweighed his reluctance to kill.

Pollock went back to his kneeling position and continued firing. Somo leaned out and pressed the trigger, aiming his sights at the first marine he saw. A second later twenty of Mengsk's men rushed up to support Pollock's position and sealed the fate of the Confederate marines.

★ ★ ★

Sela was taking heavy fire. The shields were almost gone, but at least the turret didn't have much left. A steady stream of fire from her burst lasers was wearing the weapon down, but not fast enough. The marines were all but gone now; just a few left who were exchanging fire with the ground troops, but the missiles were still doing enough damage.

★ ★ ★

Gunnery Sergeant Tanner knew that this was it. Most of his men were lying at his feet now, and the dropships had landed. This position could not be held much longer, and the turret was just about finished. The Wraith had taken a barrage of fire, and couldn't have many shields left. The attackers were too well covered for him to get a very good shot, so Sergeant Tanner turned his weapon on the last target he could attack with any degree of

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

effectiveness; the Wraith.



The turret was almost gone, and that was good, because Sela's shields were all but finished. She realized then that she was taking additional fire from one of the marines. Her shields finally gave, and the first rocket to penetrate impacted with her right-side wing, sending the fighter up and sideways, into the massive wall of sand that rotated around it. In a blinding instant her control over the craft was gone and the fighter was swept into the maelstrom. The cockpit was spinning then, and the only thing her eyes could focus on were the tiny lights on the control panel. She felt an impact soon after, and wondered if she was still alive. Then her world turned dark.



Somo watched as the Wraith was sucked into the pinnacle. It was gone in the blink of an eye, spewed out now into the desert somewhere. Somo wondered if Sela could have survived the crash. He became aware that Pollock had charged out from their position, and stepped out to provide cover fire. Pollock didn't need it; all of the marines had now been dispatched; all save one, who stood looking skyward with an air of satisfaction.

Pollock charged forward, firing as he did so. The steady stream of fire knocked Gunnery Sergeant Tanner back, until he too came into contact with the wall of the

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Pinnacle and was swept away. To Somo he looked like a child's toy, some kind of action figure as he pinwheeled through the tempest's wall, up and around, and then was gone.



Doctor Flanx and his assistant were sitting on the floor in the observation room, waiting for the conflict to end.

"Listen," said the doctor. "The firing's stopped." He smiled. "I told you it was going to be okay." The assistant nodded feverishly, laughing and returning the doctor's smile. They heard steps then, pounding metallic steps as booted feet traveled down the hall outside. The hatchway to the observation room opened, and a man in marine combat suit armor strode in. The armor he wore did not bear the markings of the Confederacy. Doctor Flanx stood, his smile fading.

Pollock raised his weapon and pointed it at Doctor Flanx's face. "You are now a prisoner of the rebellion," he said. Three more suited men entered the observation room. One of them leveled his weapon at the doctor's assistant.

Somo entered the room, noted the men at gunpoint, and noticed a window that looked out into another room. Somo approached the window and stopped, not really believing what he was seeing.

Half of the room was covered in a purplish goop. Seated in a chair in the room's opposite side was a

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

woman with her head slumped to her chest, wearing a plain green robe. Her hair was a deep, striking red. In front of the woman was a creature that resembled an oversized beetle. It had curled up into a ball, as if waiting for the woman to awake.

“What in the known systems . . .” Somo began. Pollock stepped up to Somo’s side and looked into the room.

“We take everything back with us that we can. We’ve got ten minutes. What we can’t take, we burn. Let’s move.”

Several minutes later, the four rebel dropships lifted off and away from the burning remains of the Fujita facility. Miraculously, after several tries, the tank’s engine came to life long enough for Forest to board it onto one of the craft. The last turret had finally been destroyed, and the ships met no resistance as they rose out of the Pinnacle and traveled to a spot where one of the pilots had detected a faint heat signature in the desert. Sela Brock was taken from her half-buried craft, unconscious but alive, carried into the ship, and was soon on her way with the others back to the *Hyperion*.

CHAPTER 4

GHOSTS OF THE PAST

THE UNIVERSE NEWS NETWORK COVERAGE OF THE rebel attack on Vycor 5 was saturated with omissions, embellishments, and all-out lies, as the Confederacy-controlled media coverage always was. Nothing aired on UNN that was not edited for content by the Confederacy, and so the attack on Vycor 5 was presented as a vicious, terrorist rebel strike on an environmental research facility in which several civilians were killed and valuable scientific data concerning the Fujita Pinnacle was lost.

Arcturus wondered how long the people would allow themselves to be misled. As long as the media cowered to the Confederacy they could paint whatever pictures they chose, and the Sons of Korhal were making nothing more than the tiniest of dints in the Confederacy's armor. Something would have to be done, something on such a grand scale that not even the media could cover it up.

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

But, all things in their time, the general reminded himself. The scientists were now in the process of studying the dead alien creature (Pollock had decided it was easier and safer to transport it that way) and the substance. Arcturus had never seen anything like it. There had actually been contact made with an alien presence, and the Confederacy had concealed the information from its people. Based on what he had seen so far, Arcturus's best guess was that they intended to develop some kind of biological weapon. It was obvious, according to what Pollock and Somo had told him, and on the confiscated report that was taken from the lab, that the Confederacy was conducting experiments to study the interaction between the aliens and humans. And this woman, who now lay before him, was the only human test subject left. What had happened to the others? What else had the Confederacy already learned about the aliens? But most of all, Arcturus wanted to know, why *her*? And how important was she to the Confederacy? Mengsk was beginning to think that she might turn out to be a valuable ally. But . . .

Somo entered the sick ward where Arcturus was seated, looking thoughtfully at Sarah as she lay unconscious in the bed before him. The general did not look up when Somo entered; did not even seem to know that he was there.

"Sir?" Somo said. The general looked up at him then,

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

looking like a man who has just been forced to make a painful decision.

“Sir, will she be all right?” Somo motioned toward Sarah.

Arcturus looked back at her, as if contemplating the very same question. Somo thought Arcturus’s behavior odd, but remained silent.

“We’ll see. We’ll know when she comes out of surgery.”

“I didn’t know it was that bad.”

The distant look in Arcturus’s eyes returned. He didn’t seem to process Somo’s statement for a long moment. “Hm? Oh. It’s not her injuries from the facility that necessitate her operation. All the medics at that lab did—physically, anyway—was drug her.”

Arcturus stood, and walked to the bed. He lifted Sarah’s fiery hair and pulled back the upper part of her left ear. There was scar tissue on her neck.

“You see this scar?”

Somo nodded, and the general continued. “It means that our ‘patient’ here is a Ghost—one of the Confederacy’s most highly trained and dangerous operatives. It also means that she’s a telepath.”

“You mean she can read minds?” Somo had the awe-filled look of someone who was suddenly thrust into the presence of a superior being.

“Yes, and perhaps more. Telepaths have powers that

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

not even the Confederacy fully understands yet. That's why they ensure the compliance of their Ghost soldiers by putting 'neural inhibitors' inside their brain." Mengsk pointed to the scar. "It makes them highly responsive to orders, and in most cases, inhibits their memories."

"Why do they want to repress their memory?" Somo asked.

Arcturus waited for a moment, choosing his words carefully. "Because Ghosts are only sent on the blackest of operations. They are assassins, infiltrators, and murderous automatons under Confederate control. The inhibitors are implanted so the Ghosts cannot remember the things they have done, and therefore if captured cannot give up any Confederate secrets to the enemy." Arcturus stood over Kerrigan, looking down at her. Unreadable emotions passed over his face. "We're going to have her inhibitor removed."

Pollock Rimes stepped into the room. He glared savagely at Somo for a moment before turning to General Mengsk. "Our new doctor has finished his examination of Lieutenant Brock. She appears to be just fine. Doctor Flanx seems more than eager to prove himself in his new capacity."

Mengsk nodded. "Good. We'll allow our friendly doctor to prove beyond a doubt that his loyalty has been subverted." The general looked down at Sarah. "Tell him to report to me immediately."

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

“Yes, sir.” Pollock turned his eyes to Somo. “After I speak with the doctor, I want to have a talk with you.”

“Something’s the matter, Lieutenant?” asked Mengsk.

“Nothing a little discipline can’t handle, sir.” Pollock nodded at Mengsk; Mengsk nodded back and Pollock left the room. Somo looked after him questioningly, wondering what the lieutenant wanted to yell at him about now.

Arcturus turned back and continued staring at Sarah Kerrigan. Somo found himself looking at her also, hoping that she would come through this okay, desperately wanting just to speak with her, to see what kind of individual she was. If Mengsk was right, she had spent her life as an unwilling participant in horrible acts that she could not remember. She had probably lived her life as a recluse and an outcast. Somo knew what it was like to be shunned, and he felt a sudden bond with the prone woman.

I wish I could read her mind, Somo thought.



Sarah knew that she had been having nightmares, but she couldn’t remember what they had been about. Every time she tried to remember, horrible images flickered through her mind’s eye, too brief to fully grasp: dark rooms, a strange, creeping substance, a maggot-like creature . . . but what before that? Where was she now? *You’re still dreaming,* she told herself. *It’s not time to wake*

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

up yet, Sarah. Soon. That voice was not hers; she couldn't place it, but she thought it must be her mother's. She struggled to remember things about her mother, what she had looked like, sounded like, been like . . . but nothing came. Then she tried to remember her father, and again nothing came. It was as if all the doors inside her mind were locked, and she no longer held the key. She knew that she had possessed the key at one time, but had no idea how or where she had lost it.

She seemed to hear voices then, distant murmurings that would fade in and out, sometimes becoming distinct enough that she thought she might be able to understand what was being said, but then the voices would slip away again to a faint mumble and would be gone.

Underneath those voices was something barely discernible, hidden deep within the insular regions of her mind: a calling; a beckoning invitation that was not expressed in words but only in thought, foreign and distant and not capable of being translated into language. Sarah was aware of this only briefly before the recognition of it was lost and her mind returned to trying to unlock the sealed doors of her memory.



"If you freeze up again during a mission, you won't be coming back. You got that?" Pollock's eyes were wide, looking back and forth between Somo's, searching for the slightest hint of protest or defiance, any excuse for

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Pollock to make an example out of the young recruit. Somo did not give it to him.

“I won’t freeze up again. That was the first time I—” Somo started.

“Don’t give me excuses, Private; I’ve heard plenty, and from better men than you. In case you haven’t figured it out yet, you’re not my favorite person. I don’t think you belong here. But even though you’re more trouble than you’re worth, I’ve put up with more than I usually would because we need every man we’ve got. But don’t think for a minute that our lack of personnel gives you any wiggle room to be a screw-up.”

“Like I said, it won’t happen again.” Somo held Pollock’s eyes, making every effort not to glance at the concave indentation in the lieutenant’s head (he doubted that would help his situation any).

“If it does, the next time will be the last.” Pollock spun and exited the room.

Somo proceeded directly from the break room where Pollock had pulled him aside back to the sick ward to check on Sela, and of course, the other female patient, the Ghost. He hoped that she had made it through the surgery okay.

★ ★ ★

For the longest time there was only blackness. Then there was a sensation of slowly returning to reality, like coming to the surface of dark waters. Her mouth was

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

dry, and her head ached dully. There was a brightness perceived through her closed eyelids. There were noises: the hum of equipment, the low deep rumble of massive engines. There was also a thought pattern, difficult to discern, multilayered and complex, like no other pattern she had read before. The basic gist of the thought stream was that the person considered her to be important, and that was why she was still alive.

Sarah Kerrigan opened her eyes. She was in a bright room. There was a man seated next to her bed, watching her intently. He was a stern older man with long hair tied back in a tail, whitening in places. A large mustache graced his lip and a protruding brow sheltered piercing gray eyes. He wore a uniform that resembled that of the Confederacy only slightly.

“Hello,” the man said.

Sarah stared back at him for a moment, then replied. “Where am I?”

“You are on board the *Hyperion*, a battlecruiser under my command. You are here as a guest of the Sons of Korhal. My name is Arcturus Mengsk.”

“Sons of Korhal? Who—” Sarah began as the hatchway to the room slid open. Somo poked his head in, and saw that the general was there.

“Sorry. I just wanted to see if she was okay.” Somo looked at Sarah and offered a smile. He was a young man, not unattractive. Kerrigan stared back at him,

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

showing indifference. She still did not know where she was, and who these people were, so she reminded herself to stay on the defensive. "I'll just, uh . . . go." Somo stepped back out and the hatchway slid shut.

Arcturus returned his attention to Sarah. "We liberated you from a Confederate test facility on the planet Vyctor 5. You were being subjected to some kind of experiments involving an alien species. Do you remember any of that?"

Sarah thought for a moment. There was a montage of images parading through her mind: the inside of living quarters aboard a carrier. She was being transferred, although she couldn't remember from where; then, a massive funnel cloud, and the carrier descending to a complex at the vortex's base. She was taken to a lab and given drugs. Then things became more indistinct. Dark rooms, strange substances covering the walls and floors, reaching out for her . . .

"I remember some things. I don't know why I was there, or everything that happened."

The general nodded. "Do you remember—"

"What I did before I came to the facility . . ." Arcturus had almost forgotten that telepaths had a disconcerting habit of completing other people's sentences. He simply nodded and waited patiently.

Sarah concentrated. There were brief flashes: visits to distant worlds, stalking through hallways, traversing

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

open battlefields, raising a weapon to fire . . . then a glimpse of something far more dark and sinister, a blade across a throat, and gushing blood.

“I don’t know.”

Arcturus knew that she was lying. And Sarah, being a telepath, knew that Arcturus knew. However, she did not read any animosity in his thoughts—at least, not on the surface. There was animosity there, but it was buried deeper than Sarah was able to penetrate.

“You were a Ghost, a Confederate soldier. Before you became a soldier, a chip—called a ‘neural inhibitor’—was implanted in your brain. Part of the function of the inhibitor is to repress memory. The rest of your memory loss is due to the drugs administered during the experiments. We have removed the chip, and the drugs’ effects are not permanent. I believe that with time, and patience, and the proper guidance, you may regain your memories. All of them.”

“And what do you want in return?”

“For now I just want you to rest. We can discuss the subject in greater detail at a later date. I don’t want you to feel, at any time, that you are a prisoner here. You will have access to any part of this ship you like, and my door will always be open to you. I think that once you have regained your memory, without the interference of the chip, you will come to the conclusion that you were fighting for the wrong side. But it’s important that you

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

reach this conclusion on your own.”

Sarah was unsure how to respond. She could not remember ever having been treated this way. Arcturus offered a brief smile and rose.

“If you have any questions, do not hesitate to ask me.” The general walked to the hatchway, then stopped and turned back. “By the way, do you remember your name?”

A name rose to the surface of her consciousness then, without any prompting on her part; she blurted it out uncertainly, aware of how strange it sounded to her, as if she had not spoken it in years.

“Sarah . . .”

But Sarah what? For now, she could not remember the rest. At the hatchway, Arcturus smiled once again. “Well, Sarah, rest easy.” The general then turned and was gone.

★ ★ ★

The containment cell was meant for patients who suffered contagious viral infections. It was a climate controlled, airtight chamber that could be supplied with oxygen when necessary. At this time the chamber was not oxygenated, which made the state of its contents (that was the only word that really fit, “inhabitant” just didn’t seem right) all the more puzzling.

A container marked as hazardous had been taken from the Fujita facility. Scanning equipment determined

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

that a living organism resided within the container, and the decision was made to open the container inside the cell. Within a few short minutes the organism within the container had propagated to an alarming degree, covering every surface in the room, and it had done so without the benefit of oxygen.

The cell walls were transparent. Arcturus Mengsk stood now beside Helek Branamoor—a Umojan scientist who had spent his pre-rebellion life as a geologist—staring at the substance on the other side. It was almost jellylike, laced with veins and arteries, and pulsating with life.

“The self-replicating cell structure is unlike anything I’ve ever seen. It’s incredibly resilient. The only adverse reaction I’ve noted so far is to extreme heat. It doesn’t like fire very much.” The professor smiled, obviously very excited about his work.

Arcturus reached up and laid his hand on the glass. The substance churned and contracted. Professor Branamoor smiled and motioned for the general to follow him down the hall. “If you like that, you’re going to love this. . . .”



Inside Research Lab One, Professor Branamoor led the general to an incubator-like device near the center of the room that was currently housing the dead alien larva. The creature had been dissected, its belly opened up, the

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

skin removed to expose a complex network of inner organs.

"I think it's basically just a larva, a precursor, if you will, to something bigger. Within this creature's DNA are countless sequences, carrying billions of patterns and nearly infinite possible combinations. I think what we're seeing now is just the first stage of its life cycle." The professor was still grinning eagerly.

"If I'm following you," said Arcturus, motioning to the larva, "you're saying that once this creature enters the metamorphosis stage, it could become almost anything."

"That's just a theory, mind you, but I believe it's very possible."

"So how does it determine what it will become?" Arcturus asked.

"I don't know. Perhaps a catalyst within the environment, or some kind of predetermining factor in the creature's life cycle."

Arcturus nodded gravely. "Is it dangerous?"

"At this stage in its development I really don't think so. But post-metamorphosis . . . who knows?"

Arcturus was quiet for a moment. The professor wondered what thoughts were taking place inside his mind but decided not to ask. Finally Mengsk spoke. "Thank you, professor. Let me know anything else you find immediately."

"Of course," the professor replied. The general took

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

one last look at the creature and left the room.



For the briefest moment, Sarah thought she could remember her mother's face. It was there and gone again, more like a hallucination than a memory, but it had been pleasant and strong and beautiful, and Sarah clung to it. Over the course of the past few intervals, Sarah had begun to remember more and more, but the memories were always snippets; pieces of the greater whole. She remembered more of the Fujita facility, of the experiments, and those memories she chose not to focus on as much.

She tried to remember her last name, her last birthday, her father's face . . . all these things still eluded her. Most of her life still eluded her, now that she thought about it. She could not remember her training at the Ghost Academy, or how she even came to join the Confederacy. She could not remember her childhood years, or her teenage years. She could not remember most of the missions she had performed as a Ghost. What little she could remember seemed surreal and fantastic, more of a dream than reality, for in these memories she was an invisible warrior, unseen and unheard, and she was an assassin. These half-memories frightened her most of all; she would watch herself through her own eyes as she committed ruthless and horrific acts of violence (she could never see the faces of those she

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

killed, though, and she was thankful for that). In those moments she told herself that she had been in some kind of altered state, that she was not herself, that the real Sarah would not do those things. But even then, a part of her knew the truth.

The hatchway in the room slid open and Sarah opened her eyes. The Asian man who had looked in on her before stood in the entryway somewhat awkwardly.

“You might want to step into the room before the hatchway slides shut,” Sarah said, nodding at the entryway. The other man laughed and took a step into the room. The hatchway slid shut behind him.

“Hi, my name’s Somo. I’m the one who . . . uh, brought you from the . . . from Vycor 5 here on board. I just wanted to see how you’re coming along.”

The man was obviously very nervous, and obviously very taken with her. She didn’t need to be a telepath to realize that. When she did read his thought patterns, she found him to be sincerely concerned for her. His mental signature was unlike that of a lot of the men she encountered. She detected a strength that came from deep within him, as well as an amazing will power and a genuine appreciation of life.

“So . . . how do you like the *Hyperion* so far?” Somo asked. Sarah picked up an immediate self-chastisement in him then for blurting out what he perceived to be a stupid remark. It went something like: “*How do you like*

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

the Hyperion?” *You idiot! She’s going to think you’re a moron.* Somo offered a nervous smile and Sarah began to laugh. It was the first time she could remember laughing in a very long time. As a matter of fact, she couldn’t remember the last time she *did* laugh. It felt good and for a while she could not stop.

“I don’t think you’re a moron,” she finally offered.

Somo started to smile, and then his features froze as he realized he had only been *thinking* what she had just responded to; then his smile returned as he remembered she was a telepath.

Sarah simply smiled back at Somo knowingly.

“You know, I get the feeling that we just had a conversation on two different levels,” Somo said. “That’s pretty weird.”

“I think it can be quite efficient,” Sarah responded. “It’s a great way of cutting out all the crap.”

Somo nodded. “Since I’m trying to think of the best way to ask you if you’d like to have coffee sometime, and you know that’s what I’m thinking, then I suppose I don’t really have to ask, unless thinking of it doesn’t really count as asking, which brings me right back to—”

“Let me help you out. I would like to sometime, but right now I’m still tired and I want to get some rest.”

“Okay . . . sure, great. I’ll let you get back to, uh, resting, then.” Somo walked back to the hatchway and waved at Sarah before stepping through.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

"I'll see you later," she said. Somo nodded happily and the hatchway slid shut.

As Sarah lay in her bed, gazing up at the ceiling, she began to wonder when Arcturus would call on her to discuss what he wanted in return for rescuing her from the Fujita facility. Eventually she decided that the general would approach her in his own time, and she drifted into sleep.



Doctor Flanx had already decided that he would do whatever it took to get out of this situation alive. If that meant telling the revolutionaries what they wanted to know, so be it. The doctor was convinced, however, that the Confederacy would soon overcome their little rebellion, and when that time came, he meant to cast himself in the best possible light. Perhaps he could even have a hand in vanquishing the Sons of Korhal, if he could gain enough of their trust. And then, when the time came and the Confederacy squashed their little uprising, Doctor Flanx would be a hero. Perhaps he could even become a special adviser to one of the ruling fathers. Maybe have his own penthouse suite in one of Tarsonis' superstructures. Hell, maybe he could own the whole building. And his name would be forever recorded in the Digi-tomes of history.

With these thoughts in mind, Doctor Flanx proceeded down one of the *Hyperion's* labyrinthine hallways,

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

escorted by two combat-suited marines. He was led to a hatchway and told to enter.

Inside the room Pollock Rimes stood near an empty chair, facing a bare table. Across from the empty chair sat Arcturus Mengsk. There was another fully suited marine in the far corner, and as the doctor stepped in he thought he detected yet another seated in the nearest corner on Pollock's side. The two marine escorts waited in the hall as the hatchway slid shut.

So, this is it, the doctor thought. He knew it was just a matter of time before the rebels got around to their interrogation of him. He was surprised it had taken this long. Then, he thought, maybe they wanted him to settle into a false sense of security.

The doctor nodded at Pollock, who simply barked out, "Sit."

Doctor Flanx settled into the chair and looked across at the grave face of General Mengsk. Pollock remained nearby, close enough, it seemed, to cuff the doctor on the head if he stepped out of line during the questioning.

"I want to know when and how the Confederacy became aware of the alien presence."

"Um . . ." The doctor threw a sheepish glance at Pollock, who glared back, then turned back to Mengsk. "As far as I know, the species was detected nearly five cycles ago, on a fringe planet in the Koprulu sector. It was reported to a local marshal, and several scientists

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

were sent to investigate. It, hm-mm,” (the doctor cleared his throat and swallowed; his voice had begun to go hoarse), “it was determined that the species was not indigenous, but beyond that, little to nothing was known about the organisms, aside from their staggering proliferation abilities. Um . . . then more reports came in, from neighboring planets. It seemed that the infestation was extensive, and it was determined that the aliens should be studied.”

The silence in the room was painful. The doctor looked hopefully at Mengsk, who only glared back. He looked at the marine in Mengsk’s corner, who seemed ready and more than willing to use his gauss rifle at the first signal from the general. The doctor tried to glance behind him, at the marine seated in the corner, but Pollock stepped forward and blocked his vision.

“Why experiment on humans?” The general’s eyes were twin drills now, boring through the doctor’s skull and peering right into his mind. The doctor could almost actually feel the general mentally probing him.

“Wh- uh, I was of course acting under orders to experiment with human subjects, but only to determine how the creature and the uh, Creep, as we call it, would interact with people.”

“Why was the Ghost the only subject left?” Arcturus leaned forward, resting his elbows on the table.

“Well, it’s interesting, actually. We found that both the

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

alien substance and the larva had a specific reaction to telepaths; or at least that's what we thought. We couldn't really prove it until we performed the tests in an isolated environment and it turned out to be true. The female subject, though, the Ghost . . . she seemed to provoke the strongest reaction in both the Creep and the larva. So, we decided to continue with her and discontinue the experiments with the others."

"What did you do with the other subjects once they were no longer needed?" There was an edge to the general's voice that made the doctor even more uncomfortable.

"I don't really know—"

"I'm warning you not to lie to me," the general said flatly. The doctor decided that the best course of action would indeed be to tell the truth, because he could pass the buck onto someone else. "I believe that the marines were ordered to . . . uh, eliminate them and dispose of their remains, due to the top secret nature of the experiments."

"So they were killed. And what happened to the inhabitants of the Fringe planets, where the species was originally discovered? Surely the Confederacy didn't have all of them eliminated." The calmer Arcturus remained, the more uncomfortable the doctor became. He could feel his hands trembling against his knees under the desk.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

“Well, as far as I heard, uh . . . a genetically engineered disease was released on those planets. I believe they said it was cholera.”

Arcturus nodded at the doctor. He turned and glanced at the marine in the corner behind him, and the doctor was just barely able to prevent himself from urinating in his pants. “Escort the doctor out,” the general said. The marine nodded and approached the table.

Doctor Flanx stood shakily. Pollock once again blocked the doctor from seeing the marine in the corner near the doorway, and the doctor began to wonder if the lieutenant was doing it on purpose. *Hey, at least you're alive*, he thought.

“One more thing,” said the general. “Why the Fujita facility?”

The doctor turned. “Well, in order to prove conclusively that the aliens were reacting to the telepaths, we needed to ensure that there was absolutely no outside interference. The Pinnacle provided that naturally, and already had facilities in place.”

The general nodded again, then looked to the marine. “Introduce our new friend to Professor Branamoor,” he said. The marine nodded inside his helmet.

Once the doctor was escorted out of the room, Pollock turned to the combat-suited marine seated in the corner. Sarah removed the helmet of the suit, stood, brushed past the lieutenant, and sat at the table where the doctor

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

had sat sweating just a moment before. She returned Arcturus's cool gaze with equal confidence.

"Was he lying?" the general asked.

Sarah shook her head. "No. He was scared to the point of passing out, but he was telling the truth."

"Good," the general replied. "I hope that some of what he said was helpful to you, as well."

Sarah looked down at her lap, conceding in her own mind that she had indeed been fighting for the wrong side. "It was helpful. And now that I don't have the chip to interfere, I know that what the Confederacy is doing is wrong. I want to help you."

"I think that you could be a powerful asset to our cause. I welcome you." The general offered a smile, the first that Sarah had seen cross his face. She was tired from the constant probing of the doctor's mind, and she now had a great deal more to think about, so she nodded back to the general and said: "Thank you. Right now I'd like to get some more rest."

The general stood. "Of course. When you feel up to it, I'd like to speak with you some more."

Sarah stood and nodded her acknowledgment. Pollock led her to the door. "I can find my way, thanks," she said to the lieutenant. Pollock looked at Mengsk, who shook his head slightly. Pollock clenched his jaw, staring at Sarah. She did not like what was going through the lieutenant's mind.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

“Hey,” she said to Rimes on her way out, “I heard that.” Sarah walked through the hatchway and out into the hall. *I’ll have to take care to remember her little ability,* Pollock thought as the hatchway door slid shut.

CHAPTER 5

AN UNINVITED GUEST

OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL INTERVALS, MANY OF THE facts (as well as an abundance of speculation) regarding the alien race were spread among the various soldiers, technicians, engineers and other remaining rank-and-file personnel aboard the *Hyperion*.

General Mengsk in fact carefully monitored the dissemination of these rumors, even from within the inner sanctum of his personal quarters and from his post on the bridge. Certain key people (including Sarah, a fact not lost on Lieutenant Rimes) were entrusted with the information and allowed to propagate it. Mengsk knew that from there the rumors would snowball into an entirely different beast, that conjecture would lend its hand and transform the facts and that the end result, whatever it may be, would only fuel the fire against the Confederacy.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

The *Hyperion* returned to Umoja for five planetary days. Mengsk sat in on several meetings with the Umojan ambassadors, and important decisions were made. A course of action was decided upon, and wheels were set in motion. During the leave, Sarah kept mostly to herself, remaining in the quarters provided and refusing Somo's invitations to "hang out" on several occasions. She had begun to remember more, and the more she remembered, the more disturbed she became. Forest Keel and several others engaged in liberal alcohol consumption, and the on-site medical staff had its hands full for quite a while, especially with Forest, who reportedly drank a bottle and a half of Scotty Bolger's Old No.8 by himself. Lieutenant Brock rejected several propositions but finally relented to Private Tibbs during a night of drunken carousing and a lapse in her normally resolute judgment. Pollock Rimes, for his part, took his alcohol to his quarters and drank alone. On the morning of the sixth day, the *Hyperion* was restocked and the rebels were transported back to dry dock where they boarded the now familiar ship and settled in for another long voyage.

There was no indication of what their next mission might be, or when it would take place. In the meantime, the soldiers were occupied with training exercises and drills until they could don their combat suits in less than sixty ticks and could disassemble, clean and reassemble

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

their weapons with blindfolds on.

The *Hyperion* was at the border of Protected Space and was about to cross over into the Confederate dominion. Once again the rebels had become anxious and ready to see more action.

They would not have to wait for very long.



Even though she could see, Sarah knew that the hallway was in fact pitch black. Her vision was tainted by a reddish hue and objects in the distance were blurry and indistinct, but a mapping display in the left-hand corner of her field of vision told her exactly where to go.

She ascended a set of steps and made her way through the halls of the manor's upper story. She arrived at the open door of the master bedroom. Inside, she approached two sleeping figures. There was more light here, moonlight streaming in from an open window somewhere nearby. Sarah approached the large canopy bed. She withdrew a blade from somewhere on her person, and she grabbed the figure in the bed, pulling him up against the corner post of the canopy and in one smooth motion swiping the blade across his throat. The blood began to gush then, as the figure stumbled back into the moonlight, revealing—

Here is where the memory ended. This particular recollection was the most vivid and complete to date—as well as the most disturbing. Sarah sat up in the bunk,

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

burying her face in her hands. Regaining her memory was all well and good, but sitting in this tiny room and reliving the same troubling events over and over was taking its toll on her. She needed to get out, to talk with other people, to try to remind herself that she was normal and human and capable of putting her past deeds behind her forever.

Sarah walked through the claustrophobic ship's hallway, toward compartment 17. Navigating the halls reminded her somewhat of the memory she just had, and she tried with all her power to force it out of her mind. She stood before the hatchway of number 17 and pressed the call button.

The hatchway slid open and Somo, reclining in his bunk reading a Digi-tome, sat up. His eyes widened to the size of credit chips.

"Hello!" he managed. Then, with concern, "Is everything okay?"

"Yeah . . . I just thought I might take you up on that coffee." Somo's mouth opened in a wide smile, revealing a set of near-perfect teeth. Sarah felt a wave of pure joy wash over her from the younger man, and it felt good.



The mess hall was unusually crowded and Somo and Sarah had to hunt for a place to sit. Although Somo had avoided more encounters like the one involving the warp-rats, the derisive stares continued, and Sarah

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

sensed these and felt the negative thoughts of the men as they made their way through the mess hall and took their seats. She was equally aware of the appreciative and, in some cases, lascivious glances and thoughts that followed her across the room. Somo sat in an empty spot next to Forest, and Sarah sat across from him.

Forest, for his part, had been among the few who did not treat Somo with the same cold indifference as the others. Somo nodded to the old man now, who was in the process of masticating a particularly large cut of Umojan skalet meat.

“I’ll tell ya what,” exclaimed Forest, turning his wild eyes to Sarah briefly, “they sure know how to grow ‘em on Umoja! Milk-fed, that’s the way to go every time. Straight from the teat.”

Sarah smirked at the old man amusedly, sifting through his thought patterns. It was, to her, like a garden that had been overrun and neglected.

The old man sat, still chewing, looking back and forth between the two of them and holding one utensil in each hand, his fists resting on the tabletop. “My mother, may she be granted eternal solace, used to cook up skalet that would make your toes curl. I bet your mom could make some mean skalet herself,” he said to Somo.

Sarah felt Somo’s mood change. “She used to,” was all he said.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

“Ah, she don’t cook no more, huh? Poor lad.” Forest was still chewing, and shaking his head.

Sarah read the thoughts going through Somo’s mind then, searching for the most polite way to say that his mother was gone.

“I’m sorry,” Sarah offered. Somo looked up, and in spite of himself, he smiled just a little. “You’re amazing.”

“Wait a minute, sorry for wha— Oh, she’s not— Well, kick me in the nuggets, boy. I’m sorry. I didn’t even think—how did it happen?”

Somo was now thinking that tact was not among Forest’s finer points, even as he answered. “Cholera. My mother and father both.”

“I heard something about that. Affected a few of the Fringe worlds, if I remember right. Wiped out entire populations.” Forest was shaking his head. “I’m sorry to hear that, boy. Well, suppose I better get some beauty sleep before the next drill.” Forest stood up and grabbed his tray (with the utensils still in his hands), offered a brief “see ya,” and was on his way.

Somo looked at Sarah then. Her head was tilted, her mouth slightly open. She was staring deeply and pensively into Somo’s eyes.

“What is it?” he asked.

“Maybe I shouldn’t tell you this, but I think you have a right to know.” Sarah leaned forward. “Your parents were victims of an epidemic that was engineered by the

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

Confederacy to silence any possible witnesses of this new alien species.”

Sarah could feel Somo’s thoughts swirling, his mind going over the statement she had just made again and again. His first reaction was disbelief.

“How do you know?” he asked, looking suddenly very lost.

“The doctor from the facility, the one who was doing the tests on me, he told Mengsk. I was there. I know he wasn’t lying.”

“But they didn’t even know . . .” Somo was looking down at the table, his eyes distant. Sarah felt pity for the man.

Just then Sarah detected Pollock behind her. “It’s time for your weapons drill, Private,” the lieutenant said to Somo.

“Not now,” replied Sarah without looking up. “He’s just received some distressing news.” Somo was just about to say, “It’s okay,” when Pollock spoke up. “Our schedule does not revolve around your friend’s emotions.”

“Your schedule can wait,” Sarah replied hotly.

“Don’t you dictate to me—” Pollock began as he laid his hand on Sarah’s shoulder to turn her to face him.

Somo did not see Sarah move. Nor did he see her stand. It just seemed that in one instant she was sitting there, and the next she was up, holding Pollock’s hand

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

in a painful looking, twisted position, her hand on Pollock's face and her thumb hovering over the lieutenant's eye. Her eyes were blank, emotionless adornments on her face. "Don't ever lay a hand on me, Lieutenant," she said through half-clenched teeth.

Somo stood and ran around the table. By the time he got to the other side, Pollock had jerked back and withdrawn a knife. Somo stepped in between the two of them, holding his arms out.

"Listen! Both of you! I just found out that the reason I'll never see my parents again is because the Confederacy arranged for them to be eliminated. I'm not about to let the two of you stand here and kill each other when the enemy is out there! If we fight each other then it's all over! Don't you understand?"

Pollock sheathed his blade, looking around at the gathered spectators. "She was the cause of this altercation. Assaulting a superior officer is an offense punishable by court martial. You all saw what she did," Pollock said, waiting for affirmation. When none came he looked to the nearest table, where the group of warp-rats who had cornered Somo were seated. "You are all witnesses. Right?" Pollock was looking directly at the warp-rats' leader now.

The warp-rat shrugged his shoulders slightly. "I wasn't really looking when it happened." He turned his back and continued eating. The others either looked away or

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

remembered urgent business elsewhere. As Pollock looked around the mess hall, he could not find one pair of eyes that would hold his. Sarah had not moved. She still stared at Pollock with that blank look, a look that accompanied the blank state her mind was in, where thoughts of right and wrong held no place, where there was only action and instinct. It was, Sarah realized, a part of her Confederate conditioning. She forced herself to relax a little.

“I expect you at the weapons drill in five ticks,” said Pollock. He glanced once more at Sarah, and she could tell he was making every effort to keep his thoughts hidden from her. She knew if she concentrated hard enough, she could expose those intentions. She decided to wait.

A moment later the lieutenant turned and stormed out of the mess hall. The remaining personnel soon returned to their meals.



General Mengsk stood on the deck of the bridge, looking out at the vista of needlepoint stars that twinkled against the black vastness of space—Confederate space. The *Hyperion* was a minnow swimming through shark-infested waters. They would have to be very careful. Somewhere behind the general a hatchway slid open and Sarah stepped onto the lower deck. She looked around. The bridge seemed more like the general’s living

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

quarters than his official post. There were several Digi-tomes, a full-service bar, and even a smattering of archaic strategy games, including one Sarah recognized as chess. On the lower level, directly in front of Sarah, were several banks of monitors showing myriad systems. Some of the dots on those screens, shown in red, represented Confederate vessels. Sarah immediately felt that even in the vast expanses of space, those dots were too close.

“You called for me?” she asked, directing her attention to the imposing figure before the lookout.

Mengsk spoke without turning around. “Yes. I felt it was time that we had a more in-depth conversation, you and I. By the way, I heard of the incident in the mess hall.” Sarah did not detect accusation, in his tone or in his thoughts.

“Lieutenant Pollock laid his hand on me. If he does it again I’ll put a matching dent in that head of his.” Although the general was not facing her, Sarah could tell that he was smiling.

“I think you put a scare into Rimes. That’s not a minor feat. Rimes is the kind of person who simply does not scare.” The general turned now, facing Sarah. He stood with his hands behind his back, a silhouette against the stars. “We had information that the Confederacy was conducting studies on Vycor 5,” he began. “But that’s not entirely the reason I chose the planet as the Sons of

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

Korhal's first operation. The reason . . . was you."

The general paused. Sarah could detect something beneath Mengsk's thoughts, something that he wished to keep hidden, and he was doing an amazingly fine job of it. His was proving to be the most formidable mind Sarah had ever encountered. And she respected him all the more for it.

"The Umojans knew of your transfer to the Fujita facility. They made that information available to me, and I made the decision to release you. I had my reasons, of course."

"And those were?"

The general paused again. Sarah knew that what the general was about to say was not the whole truth. "Because I believed you could be . . . rehabilitated, for lack of a better word. Also, within your memory rests valuable information, such as the details of the security measures at the Ghost Training Academy on Tarsonis."

Sarah could not hide her amazement. "You mean to attack the Ghost Academy? On the capital planet of the Confederacy?"

"That's exactly what I mean to do. Until now the efforts of the rebels have been largely ignored in the Confederate-controlled media. I doubt even *they* could ignore an event of such magnitude."

The general stepped forward now, and Sarah could see his features. His eyes were wildly intent, focused, pierc-

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

ing. “I have a policy of not informing my soldiers of our missions until the last minute, but I’m telling you now. Not only because I trust you . . . but also because I want you to lead the assault. We have reason to believe that there are more alien specimens at the Academy. And they’re using the recruits for tests, just like they did with you. You know the Academy. You trained there. Even if you don’t remember it all right now, you will in time.”

Sarah began to understand, although she still had the nagging feeling that the truth, in its entirety, was not being presented to her. What was Arcturus concealing, and why? No matter what the general was hiding, inexplicably, Sarah felt that she could trust him. Perhaps it was the gesture of trust that he was offering to her.

“You needed me. So you rescued me from the facility and helped me regain my memory to convert me to your side so I would lead your assault. You’ve had this planned for quite a while.”

As Sarah waited for Mengsk to answer, there came a hailing from the nearby comm. Sela Brock’s wavering voice broke the silence in the room. “Sir . . . this is Lieutenant Brock. I was attacked outside my quarters. I just woke up. Didn’t see who . . . took my uplink code key.”

Uplink code keys were used to send out transmissions, either from one of several comm stations in the limited access areas, or via remote terminals located throughout

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

the ship. "Report to the sick ward immediately," the general answered to the lieutenant, then pressed another button on the comm. "Communications officer, I want you to monitor any outgoing transmissions starting now. Notify me of any unauthorized activity."

The general walked around to the bank of vidscreens. He focused on the monitor showing their current location, and then looked to nearby corresponding monitors, which showed the activity in the next closest sectors.

A voice from the comm announced: "Sir, I'm showing an unauthorized transmission was made just moments ago from a remote terminal on the cargo level."

"Nav!" the general blurted.

A voice answered: "Yes, sir."

"Prepare to go to subwarp."

"Preparing for subwarp."

On a monitor near the one in front of the general, one of the red dots disappeared from the screen.

"Too late," the general whispered to himself.

As Sarah glanced upward at the lookout there came a bending, a rippling in the field of stars outside. Sarah's eyes grew wide as the broadside of a massive metallic craft seemingly appeared out of nowhere, directly in the *Hyperion's* path. An alert was sounded.

Arcturus turned and moved to the comm. "Sir, a craft has just warped into our—"

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

The general pressed a button on the comm and responded. "Yes, I can see that, Nav. Full stop."

"Full stop, yes, sir," the navigator responded.

Just then a large vid monitor to the general's left illuminated, displaying the face of a gray-haired colonel wearing a Confederate uniform. He began to speak with a heavily accented drawl. "Attention derelict vessel. This is Colonel Edmund Duke of the Confederacy Flagship *Norad II*. Identify yourself immediately."

General Mengsk pressed a button on the comm. "Notify *Norad II* that we are a Confederate vessel on a training exercise, and send them our pass code."

On the vidscreen, Colonel Duke looked away for a moment, then looked back.

"There are no exercises authorized in this area. Do not attempt to engage your engines, and prepare to be boarded. If you attempt to interfere with our boarding party in any way, you will be fired upon."

The *Hyperion* was just now coming to a complete stop. The *Norad II* loomed before them, a hulking technological giant. The general knew that the ship itself could not fire at them sideways from its current position, but the squadrons of Wraith fighters that were now leaving the docking bay could. The *Norad II* had positioned itself the way it did simply to prevent the *Hyperion* from going to subwarp and leaving the *Norad II* to eat its wake. A textbook maneuver. The general's mind began working out

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

the situation. The range of the remote terminals was severely limited; the *Norad II* had been the closest and probably the only ship to receive the transmission. And if the general knew Colonel Duke, the stubborn old codger did not report his situation before knowing all the facts. Which meant that for right now, all they had to deal with was the *Norad II*.

The general pressed a button on the comm panel and spoke: "Nav, notify *Norad II* that their boarding party is cleared to land in docking bay one." Mengsk pressed another button. "Private Hung, this is General Mengsk. I want you to grab seven of your comrades, get suited up and armed, then report back to me. As fast as you can possibly move."

"Yes, sir," came the reply.

"Would you like me to suit up as well?" Sarah asked.

"No," the general answered. Sarah surprised herself by being disappointed. She found that she desperately *wanted* to engage the enemy. Her bloodlust, it seemed, had not been dulled by the removal of the inhibitor. But beyond the disappointment, she wondered if maybe the general did not trust her. She could detect no suspicion in him, but still . . .

"No, I would rather have you here to protect me, if it becomes necessary." The general turned to Sarah then, and a moment passed between the two of them.

The general returned to the lookout, briefly glimpsing

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

at the chronometer on the nearest console. His mind was working out the situation, weighing their chances, and thinking of a way out. Sarah watched and waited in respectful silence.

★ ★ ★

Colonel Edmund Duke couldn't believe his luck. Every Confederate officer in the known systems was on the lookout for the whereabouts of their lost Ghost, and mere moments ago they received a communication from an anonymous party giving them exact coordinates! *If I don't make general for this I'll eat my own pressure suit*, the colonel thought as he sat at his command station.

"Sir, the boarding party is ready to depart," stated a voice from the comm.

"Excellent. Send 'em away," replied the colonel.

The colonel looked at a vidscreen that showed a view from portside of the older model cruiser and wondered if the captain of the vessel could possibly be the renowned leader of the rebels . . . wouldn't that be a hoot? To bring in this upstart Mengsk . . . the Confederacy would make Edmund Duke a general for sure. The colonel had known of Mengsk, back when he was fighting for their side. He had never really liked the man then, and now he liked him even less. Bringing him in would be a pleasure.

Duke relaxed in his chair and waited to see what

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

would unfold.

★ ★ ★

On the lookout deck, General Mengsk had not moved. Sarah had waited patiently, scanning his thoughts but trying not to be invasive. This much she knew: the general had a plan. *Somehow*, she thought, *this was one person who always had a plan.*

Arcturus turned and stepped onto the lower level. He stood near the comm, watching the chronometer above it. He pressed a button.

“Sergeant Keel, this is Mengsk. Listen carefully . . .”

★ ★ ★

The doorway of docking bay one had opened to receive the Confederate dropship. It closed now, as the dropship landed. A moment later the walkway lowered and ten fully armored Confederate marines jogged down onto the docking bay deck. They proceeded to the nearest open hatchway, where Pollock Rimes waited.

“I’m Sergeant Roosevelt Brannigan of the Confederate marines. This vessel is hereby commandeered under orders of the Confederacy. Take us to your captain immediately.” Pollock nodded at the sergeant, turned, and began leading them to the nearest lift.

★ ★ ★

The charting screens cast Arcturus Mengsk’s features in a medley of primary colors as he watched and waited. He pressed a button on the comm.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

“Sergeant Keel. Are you ready to proceed?”

Sarah heard the old man’s voice answer. “I still don’t get what I’m doin’, but yeah, I’m ready.” Suddenly there was a nagging, underlying disturbance in the back of Sarah’s mind. She could not pinpoint the source of it, but believed it had something to do with the Confederate boarding party. Certainly it couldn’t be any of their thoughts . . . not at this range.

“Good. Stand fast.” The general glanced at the chronometer and pressed another button. “Nav, give me forward, fifteen degrees port at half speed, on my mark.”

“Yes, sir,” came the reply.

The general was unwaveringly focused on the chronometer now. If they were to survive this, the general knew, the timing would have to be perfect. Sarah, in the meantime, pushed any and all disturbing mental commotion to the back of her mind so that she could concentrate on the trouble at hand.



The lift in front of Pollock opened and Doctor Flanx rushed out, waving his hands and smiling.

“Thank the fathers! I’m one of you! This is a rebel ship, and I’ve been taken prisoner here. This man is a rebel as well! Don’t trust anything he says! I’ll take you to the captain myself!”

The sergeant spoke into his helmet mike: “Colonel, are you receiving this?”

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

The colonel's voice responded. "Yeah, I'm readin' ya! Follow him."

"Yes, sir," the sergeant responded. He nodded to the doctor, who turned and led the marines (two of whom now had their weapons trained on Rimes) into the lift.

On the bank of monitors, the general was taking particular interest in the displays of the *Hyperion's* interior corridors and lift systems. He watched as a display showed the lift from docking bay two ascending to the Meridian level. Another monitor showed a camera view of the marines as they exited the lift and proceeded down the corridor. The general seemed relieved, even though Doctor Flanx was now leading the Confederate troops. Sarah waited anxiously. The general spoke into the comm.

"Computer: close off section A-6 on Meridian. Sergeant Keel, proceed now."



The siege tank had been repaired when the *Hyperion* docked at Umoja, and Forest had not trained in it since. But he had no trouble now as he guided the vehicle through the towering crates of the cargo bay and through the adjoining doorway to docking bay two. The general's directions had been bizarre to say the least, but Forest trusted the man and was willing to do what he was told without question. So now he sat at the tank's controls, fully suited, steering the tank into the empty

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

bay. He then parked it in front of the outer seal door, as he was told, and engaged it in siege mode. The legs extended, the vessel lifted several feet, and Forest sat, staring at the forward monitor, which showed nothing but a massive, sealed door. He engaged the gravity accelerator to five G's, as he had been told. He put on his hearing protection, strapped into the driver's seat, and waited.

★ ★ ★

General Mengsk watched on the vid monitor as the Confederate troops made their way single-file through the narrow corridor. He spoke once more into the comm.

“Nav. Give me forward, half speed, fifteen degrees port . . . now.”

“Forward, half speed, fifteen degrees port. Yes, sir.”

The mammoth ship began moving forward toward the *Norad II*. Sarah was unwilling to believe that the general was actually doing what he seemed to be doing. She grabbed onto a nearby railing anyway.

★ ★ ★

On board *Norad II*, the word arrived to Colonel Duke's command post that the *Hyperion* was on the move. The colonel assumed that the vessel was retreating, perhaps trying to reposition to make the subwarp jump. He asked for clarification, and was told that the vessel was moving *forward*.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Those sons of Fringe-Worlders actually mean to ram us, the colonel thought. “Shields to full! Shields to full! And take crash positions!” the colonel yelled. “Sergeant Brannigan, report!”

The sergeant’s voice returned to him immediately. “En route to bridge, sir.”

“That ship is moving on our position. You get to the captain and stop that cruiser now! Double time!”

“Yes, sir.”

In all his years of captaining a ship, Colonel Duke had never once strapped himself into his command seat.

He did so now.

★ ★ ★

Somo waited, sweating inside the combat suit. He knew vaguely what the plan was, but that didn’t change the fact that it was dangerous. And he knew, like the others around him, that he was facing sentencing in Confederate courts and eventual death if he was captured. That was assuming, of course, that he lived.

★ ★ ★

Doctor Flanx led the soldiers to an L turn in the corridor. The hallway stretched on, past personal quarters, to another turn, and then they would be at the hatchway to the main deck. They were halfway down the passageway now, and the doctor was smiling; he was picturing himself accepting a medal of valor from one of the ruling fathers. *Then the promotion, of course,* he thought, *and a life*

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

of affluence on Tarsonis. Maybe even—

Just then a hatchway to the doctor's right opened. Pollock stepped into the room immediately, where four fully suited soldiers stood. One of the men passed Pollock a gauss rifle. The doctor then heard shouting. He looked down the corridor and saw that another hatchway had opened, just before the next turn. Two rebels stepped out; one kneeled. Both trained their weapons down the hall at the Confederates. They had their visors up and they yelled for everyone to drop their weapons.

In the hallway behind them, the hatchway they had just passed opened and two more rebels stepped out. Doctor Flanx saw his world unraveling around him; saw his fantasies of the easy life on Tarsonis shattered. His eyes grew impossibly wide and his brow knotted as he screamed: "You ignorant grunts! Get me outta here!" Something in the doctor snapped. He snatched a gauss rifle from the nearest Confederate, pointed it into the compartment to his right, and began firing.

★ ★ ★

They were almost on top of the *Norad* now. Sarah could hear minor impact noises from the strafing Wraiths outside. It would take a long time for the fighters to break through the *Hyperion's* shields. But the behemoth cruiser before them was another matter altogether.

"Bring shields to full."

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

“Shields to full, yes, sir.”

“And brace for impact.”

The general looked at Sarah then and motioned to his chair, indicating that she could strap herself in there if she liked. She glanced at the chair briefly, then shook her head, unable to keep her eyes from the lookout for very long. She could see small details on the looming, larger ship now, hatches, panels, and outer compartments—the kinds of things a person saw on another vessel just before a collision.

The *Norad II* was not moving. Sarah took a deep breath. *We're really doing this*, she thought as the hatches and panels grew closer; she fancied that soon she would be able to read the serial number on the other ship's cooling compartment.

There was a brilliant flash just outside as the shields collided. The clash was accompanied by a horrific screeching noise and a massive, gut-wrenching jolt. Sarah clasped her hands to her ears, shutting her eyes tight, fighting to maintain her balance, but to no avail.

She fell to the deck in a fetal position, her hands against her ears. On the upper level, Arcturus had been forced to his knees, and was likewise clutching his ears, but managed to keep his eyes on the lookout screen. Outside, brilliant flashes and ear-piercing shrieking accompanied the abrasion of the two shield systems. But slowly, incredibly, they were still moving forward, push-

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

ing the other ship away and aside in a rotating circle so that the bridge of the *Hyperion* would soon be flanking the bridge of the *Norad II*. Soon, the two ships would be side-by-side.

General Mengsk managed to stand. He stumbled to the comm, shouting to be heard: "Seal off docking bay two and open the outer doors, now!"

Long ago, General Mengsk had read of ancient battles, back on Earth, from a time when men crossed oceans in bulky, cumbersome wooden craft. At that time, when these ships fought, they would position themselves alongside each other and blast away with cannon. That had always fascinated the general. Now, millennia later, in the boundless ocean of space, Arcturus Mengsk decided to try his hand at naval warfare.

★ ★ ★

The rebel next to Somo, Saunders, he thought his name was, was down and, judging by the amount of armor-piercing spikes Doctor Flanx had pumped into him, dead. The marines in the hall began firing, into the room and in opposite directions down the hall outside. Pollock, who was being targeted by one of the marines outside, had taken cover against the wall next to the hatchway. Doctor Flanx now swung his weapon toward Somo. There was a piercing, high-pitched noise, accompanied by a monumental jarring that knocked Hung onto his back. The doctor fell against the marines in the

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

hall, who somehow managed to remain standing, and with eyes completely devoid of the last vestiges of sanity, now pointed the barrel of his confiscated rifle back down at Somo. Somo let loose with a short burst of fire, aiming at the doctor's chest. The weapon ran away from him slightly, and when Somo looked at Flanx, he saw a trail of gaping holes starting from the man's sternum and ending in his forehead. Somo watched the doctor's wide, lifeless eyes as the man fell back against the huddled marines and then slumped to the floor like a discarded puppet. On either side of Somo, three rebels had recovered from the jolt and began directing fire back into the hallway. A few marines had managed to take flanking positions on either side of the hatchway and were still firing bursts into the room.

★ ★ ★

The door was opening. Minute debris swept out into the vacuum of space as the outer seal was broken. The tank, moored by augmented G-forces, held steady. Beyond the door was a massive beast of metal, the *Norad II*. Forest Keel now understood the general's plan. A smile spread across his face as the old man became giddy with anticipation. Then the general's voice came through Forest's helmet mike. The shields outside had now been worn to almost nothing, and a great deal of the noise had died down. Still, Forest had to strain to hear. "Sergeant Keel, you may fire when ready."

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

“That’s all you had to say, skipper! Yeee-haaa!!” Forest engaged the shock cannon. There was massive recoil, and when Keel looked back at the targeting monitor, he saw a satisfying impact wave spreading across the neighboring vessel’s shield. The blast was enough to force the defensive barrier to collapse. A bright ripple ran through the shield and then it was gone. Forest fired again. This time, the impact tore through the *Norad’s* outer hull.



“What in the name of all the charted planets was that?” It seemed every warning Klaxon in the ship was sounding at once. A voice from the comm announced to the colonel that there was a breach in the outer hull, and that sections G–L of the Median deck had been compromised.

“I want to know just what in the name of the fathers is firing at us!” the colonel yelled. “Start scanning! Hell, they’re right next to us for Krydon’s sake. Go to a lookout and give me a visual!”

A moment later a voice returned. “Sir, our scanners indicate the source of the incoming fire to be a . . . siege tank. Firing from one of their docking bays.”

For the first time in many cycles, the colonel was actually speechless. Another explosion came then, followed by news of another breach. “Send the Wraith fighters to knock out that tank,” he finally managed.



STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

“Sir, the shields are spent,” the Nav informed Mengsk. “The Wraith burst lasers are beginning to damage the outer hull.”

They’re not doing nearly as much damage to us as we’re doing to them with that siege tank, the general mused. Another roaring *boom* was heard then, punctuating the general’s line of thought. With both shields gone, the jarring had ceased, as well as the deafening noise. Sarah was standing, watching as the last of the *Norad II*’s bridge disappeared on the starboard side of the lookout and out of sight.

“Nav, are we clear for subwarp?” the general asked anxiously. There was a moment of silence, then: “That’s affirmative, sir.” Another *boom* from the docking bay resounded.

“Comm, lower transmission screen and contact *Norad II*.”



Somo rolled to his left, narrowly avoiding a barrage of deadly fire from the hallway. The marines flanking the hatchway had resorted to thrusting their gauss rifles into the room and shooting blindly. Pollock, who had taken a position against the wall and near the hatchway, grabbed the gauss rifle with his bare hands the next time the barrel was poked into the room, and yanked. Somo, on the opposite side of the compartment, caught a glimpse of the dumbfounded marine in the hallway as

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

his weapon was ripped from his hands. In a different situation, the look on that marine's face would have been comical. But here it simply conveyed shock and defeat. The marine stood with his hands waving in the air; he hit a button to raise his helmet visor and began shouting: "I'm unarmed! I'm unarm—" the marine then stepped just enough in front of the doorway so that Pollock could get a clean shot. The lieutenant unloaded a full burst into the man, then proceeded into the hall, where he fired a second burst, point-blank, into the remaining marine crouched near the hatchway.



Colonel Duke was staring at an update screen, showing a top-down, wire-frame view of the *Norad II*, with damaged or compromised areas shown in red. There were four large red areas on the *Norad's* port side, four breaches that would take months to repair.

Through the lookout, the colonel could now see the bridge of the *Hyperion*, inching forward on their port side. To the left of the colonel's command seat, a vid-screen crackled to life and on it, the composed figure of a man in rebel outfitting began to speak.

"Colonel Duke, this is General Arcturus Mengsk, leader of the Sons of Korhal. When you run back to your masters, tell them that free men still live in Confederate space. Tell them that we are learning their secrets, and that their avarice will be their undoing. Tell them that

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

twilight has settled upon their regime and the changing of the guard is close at hand; and tell them Arcturus Mengsk sends his regards.”

With that, the transmission ended. There was a rippling wave that surrounded the *Hyperion's* bridge for the briefest moment before the vessel disappeared completely.

“Sir, the enemy craft has engaged subwarp,” the Nav offered.

“Thank you for keeping me apprised of the situation, Nav,” the colonel responded hotly. *It's okay, let them subwarp*, the colonel thought. Once they'd received the anonymous transmission, they had followed the Confederate protocol that had been dictated to them just an interval earlier—and it was a good thing they did. The colonel thought he might still make general out of this whole mess yet.



The battle in the hallway was over. Doctor Flanx, as well as the ten marines who had boarded the *Hyperion*, lay dead on the floor. Pollock, who had seemed enraged, shouted at Somo and the two remaining rebels in the compartment to clean the mess up, then stormed off down the hallway. Inside the compartment, two rebels lay still. In the hallway, two more rebels, one on each side, had fallen. The remaining soldiers approached the compartment, stepping over the marines and looking

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

down at the bodies in a dazed, almost somnambulant manner. Somebody asked for section G-6 to be opened and called for a medic.

Somo looked at the carnage around him, shaking his head, trying to convince himself that these were the men who were responsible for the death of his family. But as he stared down into the lifeless faces he saw only people; people who had simply been caught up in fervor and circumstance. He stood there for a long time, even after the medics arrived and carried away one of the wounded from the hallway. He stood and wondered how long this would go on, and whether or not he would live to see the end of it.

One of the other privates had gripped a fallen marine under the arms and was attempting to drag him away. He looked up at Somo in irritation.

“Are you gonna help clean up this mess or—” The rebel’s sentence was cut off by a *cha-chink* sound, a noise any experienced soldier would immediately recognize as a C-10 canister rifle being cocked. There was a *boom* then, thunderous and deafening in the confined space. The private arched forward, rocking onto the toes of his boots. His mouth hung open as he dropped the marine and fell forward. Somo stared in shock: even from his vantage point farther down the hallway, he could see the gaping hole in the private’s back. There was another cocking sound. Somo, ignoring the ringing in his ears,

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

strained to see, because he could swear that the sound he just heard came from the empty space at the end of the hall, but there was no one there. Another private, standing between Somo and the hallway's opposite end, was rushing toward his fallen comrade.

There was a second booming sound, almost like that of a miniature shock cannon. The private was lifted off of the deck by the blast. When he fell onto his back a microtick later, there was a steaming concavity where his chest had once been.

Somo could not see where the blast had come from; the end of the hall was still empty, but he had an undeniable feeling that whoever or whatever the unseen foe may be, *he* was going to be the next to die. He stepped backward and into the compartment where the trap had been set for the marines, sealing the hatchway door even as he heard another *cha-chink* sound. He waited there, inside the compartment, and he believed he could actually feel a physical presence on the other side of the door. The feeling was brief, but it was strong. A moment later the feeling was gone.

★ ★ ★

The mental disturbance Sarah had felt when the dropship landed had increased now to the point where she could no longer push it to the back of her mind. She struggled to figure out just what the disturbance was, knowing that she should know, but she just couldn't

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

remember. It was like forgetting a word she had just spoken.

The *Hyperion* had broken out of subwarp now and was cruising near the outer Fringe. General Mengsk, satisfied that they were safe for the time being, turned to Sarah. An immediate concern showed on his face.

“What’s wrong? You’re white as a—”

“Ghost,” Sarah blurted. *That’s it*, she thought. *Of course that’s it . . .*

“I was going to say a sheet, but—” The general was interrupted by Somo’s frantic voice from the comm.

“Sir, it’s Somo. I don’t know if I’m going crazy, but I think there’s an enemy still alive on board. He just killed two of our guys and I think he’s on his way to you. I know this sounds nuts, but . . . I couldn’t see him. I think he must have some kind of cloaking, I don’t know. I locked myself in one of the compartments.”

“There’s a Ghost on board, general.” Sarah advanced to the monitors showing the ship’s interior. She moved to a diagram of the upper deck, scanning the maze of halls and corridors.

“Stay there and await my orders, Private,” Mengsk spoke into the comm.

Sarah held out her hand, palm up. “Give me your weapon.”

“Pardon?”

“Your side arm, General. Give it to me now. I just

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

watched you pull us away from the brink of destruction; well, now it's my turn to save the day. None of your soldiers have dealt with a Ghost before. He'll kill everyone on this ship if you don't do as I say."

The general considered this for a moment, then nodded. There was, as always, something in his thoughts that she just could not read. He handed his weapon to her. "I want you to activate the fire suppression systems in all corridors on the upper deck." Sarah pointed to several hallways just outside. "Shut down all lifts to the lower levels. We need to keep him isolated. There isn't much time. I assume you have a filtration mask somewhere on the bridge?"

"Of course." General Mengsk proceeded to a small hatch in a nearby wall. He opened the compartment, withdrew a filtration mask and handed it to Kerrigan. She began to strap it on. When she spoke, her voice was muffled.

"Lock yourself in here and don't open the door until you hear from me." The general looked up at Sarah with equanimity. "Okay," he said. "Good luck."

Sarah nodded at him and exited quickly through the hatchway. Mengsk sealed the door behind her and activated the fire suppression systems.

Sarah stood in the hallway as the fire suppressant showered over her in a fine mist. A red warning light began flashing; a computerized voice warned all person-

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

nel to evacuate the corridors.

Sarah knew that the Ghost could breathe, even in the fog created by the fire suppressant. The headpiece the Ghosts wore acted as chemical agent masks. She remembered wearing one herself. The real purpose of activating the suppressant was to render the Ghost visible. The substance was wet and sticky, and would adhere to the Ghost, rendering the cloaking system in his hostile environment suit useless.

Both ends of the corridor Sarah now stood in were lost in a misty fog. She had a choice of two directions: left or right. She knew the logical direction would be left, since that led to where Somo and the others had been attacked, but she had to be sure. Having been temporarily overcome by the adrenaline surge that accompanied her decision to take action, Sarah had effectively muted the interference from the Ghost's alpha waves. Now she stood perfectly still, eyes closed, allowing her mind to open itself completely and receive the mental bombardment that the neural inhibitor had once suppressed. She could sense the pattern, but it was difficult to tell which direction it originated from. She concentrated harder, forcing all other thoughts from her mind. Finally she came to a decision and turned left, proceeding down the hallway.

The atmosphere inside the foggy, deserted corridors was eerie and surreal. To Sarah it felt as though she were

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

walking through a cloudbank, the only reminder of her physical surroundings being the corridor walls that emerged from the mist as she progressed. The pattern was stronger now, and she knew that she was on the right track. As she stepped forward her foot caught on something. Sarah lowered her firearm toward her feet and kicked outward. Her foot met metal. She kneeled and felt around the dense mist. It was a fallen soldier in a combat suit. She grabbed the upper portion of the chest piece and pulled upward. She recognized the face of the private, one of the men she had glimpsed in the mess hall. He was dead now, his eyebrows gathering tiny crystals from the fire suppressant being let in through his open visor.

She was at the spot in the corridor where the trap had been set for the marines, and where Somo had been attacked. The Ghost was nearby, but not too close. She could tell now. His alpha pattern was like a beacon. Sarah glanced at the hatchway door to her left. Probably where Somo had taken refuge. She made her way slowly through this part of the corridor, her foot occasionally coming into contact with one of the dead. Once at the end of the hall, she made a right, then an immediate left.

The pattern was stronger now, emanating from the end of the corridor. Sarah held Mengsk's weapon out in front of her as she came to an open hatchway.

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

Inside the compartment were several sinks, ranges, and ovens. She was in the upper level kitchen. The fire suppressant had not been activated in here and what little had drifted in from the corridor had thinned out enough to allow her to see: several upright shelving units held trays, containers, pots and pans, forming rows down the center of the room. A plethora of steel utensils hung from the bulkheads. The compartment was large, almost the size of the bridge, lined with cabinets and sinks. There were a host of hiding places within the cluttered space.

The Ghost is in here, she thought. The magnitude of the alpha patterns was almost overpowering now, like being locked in a small room with speakers blaring deafening music from all four walls. It was impossible to tell just where in the room the Ghost was. She had to concentrate.

She made her way down a row formed by two of the storage units, heading toward the wall at the kitchen's far end, glancing in between the shelves on either side for any hint of movement. Once at the end of the rows, she looked to her right and saw an open door. She walked toward it, trying with all her might to pinpoint the source of the alpha patterns. Was it beyond the door? She approached the doorway that opened into a cold storage vault. Inside, shelving units containing frozen foods formed several more aisles within the

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

room—more places for the Ghost to hide.

Sarah tried with every fragment of mental acuity she could muster to lock in on the source of the Ghost's patterns. She had to know if it came from within the room before she entered and risked having the Ghost close the door behind her, locking her in. Once again she forced all excess thought from her mind, focusing intently on the patterns.

Behind me, she thought as she dropped to one knee, spinning to face her opponent, raising her right arm. The barrel of the invisible canister rifle was knocked upward and away. There was a *boom!* that left Sarah temporarily in a world with no sound. She fired her weapon, knocking the Ghost back into one of the shelving units. Even with the thin coating of fire suppressant material, her foe was still incredibly difficult to see. A crystalline veneer hinted at a human form beneath but beyond that, the Ghost was still invisible. Moving with lightning speed, the figure lunged forward, attempting to wrest the weapon from Sarah's grip. She spun with her opponent's charge, circling around and redirecting the assailant into a nearby bulkhead. An arm reached up, snatching a large knife from one of the hooks. The figure made another lunge. Sarah jumped backward. The Ghost slashed across, from left to right, missing by inches, then raised the weapon for a downward slice.

Sarah gripped her opponent's wrist with her right

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

arm, threading her left arm around the Ghost's, grabbing her own wrist and yanking downward with all the weight of her body. She felt her opponent's wrist break as the figure hit the floor. In a blur of action she removed the knife and plunged it into the Ghost's chest. She withdrew the knife, preparing to plunge it downward again. Her eyes were wide, her teeth clenched; she was aware of an almost primordial growl emanating from her throat. She stumbled backward, dropping the knife, forcing herself to regain control. A moment later she contacted Mengsk, telling him that the Ghost was dead.

CHAPTER 6

A BRIEF RESPIRE

THERE WAS AN EXPANSIVE FIELD, WITH TALL GRASS that reached her chest. She held out her hands as she ran, allowing the blades to pass between her spread fingers. She was laughing, happy to be out of the house, in a playful mood. The sun was directly overhead, and the day would have been hot if not for the cool breeze that lifted her hair away from the back of her neck and caused her eyes to water just a little.

Sarah was five years old.

She heard a voice then, the voice of her father. As she turned she saw him in the distance, hands placed firmly and disapprovingly on his hips. He called out her name: "Sarah Louise Kerrigan, you get back in the house this instant! You still have chores to do!"

She began walking toward him then, and when she was close enough to see his features, she saw Arcturus

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Mengsk standing in his place. She suddenly became aware that she was no longer in the field. She was in a long, metallic corridor. Ahead of her on either side were large windows that looked into sealed rooms. Sarah continued walking, approaching the first window. She stared in and saw herself, at the age of eight, sitting in a metal chair, restrained. A man in a Confederate uniform paced back and forth in front of the chair, his mouth moving in speech. Sarah could not tell what he was saying. The man turned to her, staring at her through the window. He stopped pacing, his eyes drilling into her. He began to yell, but she could not hear him. She continued walking.

The next window she came to offered a view of her father, clamped into a chair similar to the one from the first room. He was not the young version of her father she saw in the field. He was older now, gaunt and sickly; his wide eyes looked out with a blank gaze. Sarah beat against the window, yelling: "Daddy! Daddy, it's me! Daddy!" but the eyes did not register any recognition of her; they instead continued to stare forward without blinking, conveying only apathy. Dejected, Sarah turned and looked toward the end of the hall. There was a staircase there now that had not been there before. She turned and walked toward it.

As her foot touched the first step the scene became instantly familiar. She had walked this staircase before,

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

in her memory; it was a recollection that her mind would not fully divulge, yet could not let go of. *It* was the haunting; she was the Ghost. She ascended the stairs and made her way down a long hall toward an open doorway. Inside two figures lay sleeping. She grabbed the figure nearest to her, pulling him to his feet; she withdrew a blade, slashing the figure's throat. The person stumbled back toward the moonlight coming in through the open window. Just as the light was about to hit the person's face . . .

Sarah awoke.

The dream left her with a strange, uneasy feeling. It was more than the act of the killing itself; there was a deeper meaning that she was thus far unable to decipher. Sitting up in the bed, she ran her fingers through her hair, wiped the blariness from her eyes and began to get dressed.



General Mengsk stood looking at the prone body of the deceased man. He still wore the Ghost uniform, but he was far from invisible now; in fact, he looked all too real laying on the gurney here in the sick ward; he looked very real, very pale, and very dead. The cloaking system shut off automatically once the suit's sensors detected that their host was no longer registering a pulse. The cloaking would have worn off before too much longer anyway; the length of time these soldiers

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

were able to remain invisible was finite.

Mengsk stared down at the identification number on the right breast of the suit, just above the puncture hole where Sarah had driven the knife into the man's heart. It read: No. 24506. All members of the Ghost program were nothing more than numbers—but this man meant far more, especially to Arcturus Mengsk, because he was one of the three.

“The three what, General?” a voice behind him asked. The general turned, and Sarah felt his mind close off immediately. It simply became a blank void where she could find no trace of thought or intention. Mengsk was incredibly good at it. “Hello Sarah,” he offered.

“Sarah Kerrigan. I finally remembered my last name, just a short time ago.”

“Well in that case, congratulations, *Lieutenant* Kerrigan.”

Sarah smiled. The general turned back toward the body on the gurney. “It's not exactly your size,” Mengsk said, motioning toward the suit, “and it will need some repair work, but with the proper alterations I think it may prove useful to you.”

Sarah approached and looked down at the suit. Seeing it now under the harsh lights prompted a feeling of disgust inside her; she connected the hostile environment suit with the person she had once been, and never wanted to be again . . . but if wearing the suit meant accomplishing the mission, she would do it.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

“Do you think he came here to kill you?” Sarah asked after a long moment.

“No. I don’t think the Confederacy considers me that much of a threat yet. I think he came to retrieve *you*. Those in power are unsure why the alien race has reacted to you the way it did, and they want to know more. “

“I think you’re right,” Sarah offered.

“Even if you didn’t technically save my life, I still want to say thank you for killing him.”

Sarah simply shrugged. “I did what I had to.”



Precisely one interval after the Ghost incident aboard the *Hyperion*, the Sons of Korhal arrived at the Kal-Bryant Mining Conglomerate, docking in orbit around the planet Pridewater. Pridewater was on the Fringe system (located several planets away from the deserted, cholera-ridden planets where Somo’s parents died), and was a rich source of several rare minerals. The docking station housed the *Hyperion* inside one of its empty bays, where it would remain hidden until the mission was complete. Surprise inspections by the Confederacy were not uncommon, but since one had been conducted several intervals ago, it was a safe bet that another would not occur for some time. The foremen at Pridewater had secretly sided with Umoja during the Guild Wars, and now further displayed their loyalty by providing infor-

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

mation and support to the Umojans when circumstances permitted.

The liaison with Pridewater was set up during the *Hyperion's* docking at Umoja, based upon a suggestion by Mengsk. Pridewater provided a staging area from which the Sons of Korhal would be able to launch their most audacious attack yet—the raid on the Ghost Academy on Tarsonis.

Once every cycle a cargo ship from the Conglomerate, loaded with minerals, would dock at the receiving terminal—an orbiting platform in Tarsonis' upper atmosphere. From there, the miners would take a transport to the capital planet itself where they would spend several intervals drinking away their concerns and cavorting with Tarsonian females. This time, however, the cycle would be different; the passengers aboard the cargo ship would not be miners from the Kal-Bryant Conglomerate, and the trip to Tarsonis would not be one of revelry.

The plan had been explained to the rebels during a briefing at the Conglomerate docking bay and now the soldiers were informed that they had a single interval before they would once again be called into action.

★ ★ ★

Sarah Kerrigan (who had repeated her full name to herself several times since remembering it—it was like trying on an old set of clothes and finding out that they still fit) sat inside a cantina at the edge of one of

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Pridewater's two major oceans. She could not remember ever having seen an ocean. She sat now, looking out the bay window from her table at the rolling waves. It was beautiful, and had a calming effect on her that she embraced.

She had found this quiet place by accident, wandering the streets alone, trying desperately to escape the cacophony of thoughts, the duplicity, the posturing, the impudence of those around her. It had been quite a long time since she had sat down and enjoyed a good drink. The last time was—well, she couldn't remember when the last time was, but she knew it had been too long.

She sensed an awkward yet sincere, nervous individual in her midst then and knew that Somo had entered the cantina. She smiled to herself as the Fringe-Worlder approached her table. "Hi, Somo," she said without turning.

"Hey . . . I saw you leave and come this way. I thought maybe you could use some company. If you wanted to be alone I could just—"

"Sit," Sarah interjected.

"Sure . . . thanks. So are you nervous about tomorrow?"

Sarah was still staring out at the waves, mesmerized by them. The sun was hovering just above the horizon. She did not turn to Somo as she spoke. "No. It's nothing I haven't done before."

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Somo found himself taken by Sarah's beauty, every nuance of her features enhanced by the soft light of the setting sun. Sarah smiled, and then began to laugh. "Thank you," she said at last.

A deep crimson hue crept into Somo's face. He stopped staring and raised his hand for a drink. Sarah spoke: "Sometimes I wish the chip hadn't been removed, that I had just continued without any knowledge of what I was doing. I know it's wrong, but I think it just the same. I sometimes wish I couldn't see what goes on inside people's heads; but then, sometimes someone comes along who makes me glad to have the abilities that I do."

A waiter brought Somo's drink. Sarah turned to Somo finally, gazing *into* him. "You're one of those people. You make me glad I'm telepathic, because you're genuine, and you're good. I should know; I've read every kind of human being you could imagine. You're like a breath of fresh air. You represent to me what people can become; you represent hope, and that's something worth fighting for."

Somo searched his mind for a response, but none seemed appropriate. "I—" he began, but Sarah cut him off as she leaned in and kissed him firmly on the lips. Sarah felt a wave of adoration wash over her and she did her best to reciprocate as the sun cast its final light of the day over the waves outside.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING



Once again Arcturus Mengsk stood before a gathering of soldiers, although this particular gathering was smaller than usual; it consisted of twenty rebels, the exact number of miners who were scheduled to dock at the receiving terminal above Tarsonis. The rebels carried the proper pass cards, and wore the proper clothes, and the cargo ship that would transport them to the terminal—the *giant*-class *Homage*—carried the proper load of minerals for appraisal and processing.

Having briefed them on the finer points of the mission, General Mengsk stood now, looking at each one individually. Among them was Somo, smiling and looking to be in an especially good mood, which was encouraging; Forest Keel was there, though he was obviously hungover from excessive carousing during his one night stay on Pridewater; Sela Brock was present and accounted for, exchanging amorous glances every once in a while with the dark-skinned Private Tibbs; Pollock was at the far right of the formation, apparently unbothered by the fact that he would be taking orders instead of giving them this time around; and finally, Sarah was present, standing to the right of Mengsk, looking every bit as determined and redoubtable as ever she had before.

“I know this won’t be the last opportunity to say it before we part company, but I’m going to say it right

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

now, anyway: I know that each of you has his or her own reasons for joining in the fight, and I won't pretend to know what all of you have been through, but suffice it to say that you are all fighting for what is right, for what you believe in . . . and for that I want to wish all of you the best of luck. Dismissed."

Sarah turned and began walking away. General Mengsk called out, "Lieutenant, a moment please."

Sarah returned. The general looked at her confidently. "I want you to seek out a specific soldier at the Academy, and bring him to me. His number is 24718. He is one of their trainers, and our intelligence suggests that he resides within the Academy barracks. I know it poses a bit of extra risk, but I would not ask if it wasn't important."

"How do I find him?" Sarah asked.

"The Academy's commanding officer will carry a locator, designed to home in on each Ghost's neural inhibitor. Simply enter his number."

Sarah thought for a moment. "If he's there, I'll bring him back. Forcibly, I presume."

The general nodded. As always, his thoughts were his own. Sarah continued. "How will I know this commander?"

"He is the Post Commander. His name is Major Rumm. He oversees the experiments."

The name sparked an immediate response within

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Sarah's mind: A memory flashed across her inner vision, of being confined in a room with a man dressed in a Confederate lieutenant's uniform pacing back and forth before her. Rumm was his name, she remembered now. Lieutenant Rumm.

The flash of memory was gone then, and Sarah noted a speculative look in the general's eyes. Sarah met his eyes, but gave away nothing.

"I'll take care of it," she said, and then turned to catch up to the others.

CHAPTER 7

THE TARSONIS GHOST ACADEMY

THE JOURNEY TO TARSONIS TOOK ALMOST A FULL interval, and gave Sarah plenty of time to think about the man she had known as Lieutenant Rumm.

The very mention of his name had opened up a host of doors within her mind, and memories filed through those doors at a slow, steady pace until she was able to piece together the series of events that led to the implanting of the neural inhibitor inside her brain.

She was eight years old. Her mother had died, she couldn't quite remember how, and she had been taken from her father, whose mental health had declined severely. She became a ward of the Confederate court system and was remanded to a fledgling science program that was being overseen by Lieutenant Rumm; a program whose sole purpose was to research and develop psychic potential within young telepaths.

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

She had undergone several tests, to induce her to display her mental powers, but she steadfastly refused (she thought the reason she refused had something to do with her mother, though she was unsure what the connection was). She had been allowed to play with a kitten for a long period of time. Apparently, the scientists had believed that Sarah possessed the ability to cause hemorrhaging within a person's brain simply through force of will. To test this theory, a tumor was implanted in the kitten and Sarah was ordered to mentally ablate the tumor, or to put the kitten out of its misery. Still, she had refused to cooperate.

Lieutenant Rumm then did the unthinkable. He confined Sarah to a metal chair. She was allowed to see her mentally vapid father, who was likewise confined in an adjacent room. Rumm then threatened to have an orderly inject Sarah's father with the same serum that created the tumor in the kitten, unless she was willing to display her powers. Even in the face of this ultimatum, she refused, threatening to kill herself and her father if Rumm continued.

It was shortly after that incident that Lieutenant Rumm gave the okay for the scientists to implant the neural inhibitor inside her head. She had been a puppet of the Confederacy ever since, and for that, she held Rumm personally responsible.

Sarah's thoughts were interrupted as the navigational

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

computer announced that they were preparing to dock at the receiving terminal.

Once at the terminal Sarah and the other “miners” were cleared through security, and herded into a small bay where they awaited a transport to take them down to Tarsonis. From this point on, they were truly on their own. General Mengsk had remained behind at the Conglomerate, and was probably watching his screens even now from the bridge of the *Hyperion*.

As the transport dropped into Tarsonis’ lower atmosphere, Sarah went through the plan in her head: She would use the Ghost suit (being worn even now under her mining overalls) to cloak and infiltrate the Academy. She would seek out the section of the institution where the experiments were taking place. Further, she would attempt to track down Major Rumm, and retrieve the tracking device he carried (what she chose to do to Major Rumm at that juncture, she would not dwell on just yet). She would sabotage the base’s security and allow the others access, whereupon the rebels would destroy the facility, Sarah would extract Ghost No. 24718, and any alien specimens would be destroyed. They would then rendezvous with Sela.

It was risky, and incredibly dangerous, but Sarah truly believed that if all went according to plan, it could actually work.

Sarah glanced across the transport at Somo, who

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

glanced back, winked and offered her a smile. She returned the smile, then turned to look out the window next to her. The transport had just descended through the massive cloud base and the capital city of Tarsonis was spread out below, a tightly packed metropolis of towering superstructures and bustling commerce. It was nighttime on Tarsonis, approaching early morning, but the city was very much alive. Lights twinkled from seemingly every window and people still occupied the streets, commuting in their vehicles or perambulating along the myriad walks.

Mixed emotions flooded over Sarah as she was bombarded with the immediate reactions of those around her: anxiousness, dread, nervousness, doubt, and hope were all among them.

They angled toward a circle of lights that indicated the landing pad of the Tarsonis Starport. The transport leveled out and touched down. Sarah watched Lieutenant Brock make her way to the cockpit. She had struck up a conversation with the pilot before lift-off from the terminal, and was now in the process of coaxing the man into joining her for a drink. When she emerged from the cockpit she would give a signal. If the ploy was a failure they would be forced to restrain the pilot, and if he resisted, resort to more drastic measures. Sarah, for one, wanted to keep the body count to a minimum.

Sarah stood as her comrades near the front of the

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

cabin headed for the gangplank. A moment later Sela emerged from the cockpit, smiling, running her right hand through her hair. Sarah relaxed. The pilot followed Lieutenant Brock out, helping her along with a playful slap on the backside. Sela giggled. Nearby, Tibbs made a guttural noise of disapproval. "Let's go," Sarah said.

A short trip aboard a transit shuttle delivered the group to the Starlite-Starbrite, a pub in the city square that was located three leagues away from the Ghost Academy's main gate.

The interior of the Starlite was a chaotic frenzy of light and noise, with a grinding bass-driven techno beat that seemed to be on a perpetual loop. There were tables available near the back, and that is where most of the group ended up; a few stayed outside and a few others actually took to the dance floor. It was part of their responsibility to represent themselves as off-world miners who had not been in a social setting for some time, and were in serious need of recreation. Sela ordered drinks for herself and the pilot, whose name was Castomar, and retreated to a corner table. Tibbs kept a watchful eye on the two as they toasted and the pilot began to drink.

Sarah decided that the time had come for her to depart. She approached Somo and told him that she was leaving. He was about to tell her to be careful, she could tell. She simply put the palm of her hand to his face and

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

said, "I know," and then she was gone.



Inside the stall of the female lavatory, Sarah slipped out of her overalls, exposing the hostile environment suit beneath. She had a shoulder bag, which she now opened, that contained her headpiece and gloves. The cloaking equipment was integrated into virtually every fiber of the suit, including the gloves, which rendered anything the Ghost held during cloaking invisible. Sarah waited until the occupant of an adjoining stall left, then donned the headpiece and activated the cloaking mechanism. It was disturbing how familiar it all seemed, how she moved automatically now, instinctively. Her vision through the goggles was tinted a reddish hue. She raised her hand before her eyes and flexed her fingers. The goggles allowed her to see her hand perfectly. She stepped out of the stall, staring at her reflection in the mirror, which the goggles also allowed her to see.

The headpiece was a strange-looking contraption, and not all that flattering. Seeing herself there in the mirror, she was forced to repress a wave of memories, of prior missions spent in these very same trappings. The door to the lavatory opened then, and a rather large woman with green hair entered and stopped. There was a brief, horrifying moment where Sarah thought, *she can see me*, before the woman clutched at her mouth, turned, and began vomiting in the sink. Sarah realized then that the

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

woman had only stopped to maintain her balance. Sarah retreated silently to the back of the room. The woman stayed for a while, moaning, until another female who bore similar features (probably a sister) entered and hauled the first woman back through the door. Sarah then opened a window that led to a small side street at the building's rear. She crawled through and made her way into the night unseen.



Somo was seated at a nearby table with Tibbs, watching Sela and Castomar, the transport pilot. She had been sipping her drink for some time now, while Castomar had downed two and ordered a third. It looked as if that part of the plan was going very well, at least.

Tibbs was watching, flexing his right hand nervously. Castomar put a hand on Sela's leg.

"That motherless—" Tibbs began.

"Hey, calm down. She's just doing her part."

Tibbs did not answer, but watched intently. Somo surveyed the rest of the room. The last time he had seen Forest, the old man had been on the floor, engaged in a dance that looked something like a cross between a bird imitation and a cardiac arrest. Forest was actually at the bar now, conversing with a much younger, and fairly attractive local. Somo shook his head and glanced down at the communicator on his hip. He knew the device would vibrate when Sarah sent the signal, but he looked

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

anyway, if for no other reason but to ensure that the communicator was still there. He then scanned the room once again, and came to a sudden realization: he had not seen much of Pollock Rimes the entire night. He scrutinized the crowd more closely, and then began looking behind him to the tables in the dark corners at the very back. Seated at one of these was the lieutenant, reclining comfortably with a drink in front of him. He returned Somo's gaze. After a moment Somo turned away and rejoined Tibbs in his scrutiny of Sela and Castomar.



The main gate of the Academy would not have been difficult to find, even for someone who had never been there before. One had only to look for the monolithic statue of Major General Brantigan Fole, a popular and integral figure during the Guild Wars, which stood in the midst of well-kept grounds facing the city square. At the statue's base, near the edge of the grounds, was a square, concrete tunnel that cut into the earth, leading down at a shallow angle and ending at a set of clear, code-locked doors that Sarah estimated to be somewhere below the major general's feet.

Sarah made her way down the impressively lit tunnel until she reached the set of doors. Just beyond the doors a sentry was posted at a small desk, reading a Digi-tome, his weapon lying on the ground at his feet. Sarah remembered serving duty at that same post on more

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

than one occasion. It was so strange to be back here, in this place once again, to be here with all her faculties about her, not as some mindless drone. She leaned against the concrete wall and waited, remembering the nights she had spent here, most of it spent in an ambiguous haze, not differentiating one day from the next, only living for the training. Others went out into the city and drank; most people drank to forget, but Sarah thought that many of the recruits who had been “resocialized” with the implanting of the neural inhibitors drank to try to remember; remember who they had been before they came here, what their lives had once been like.

It wasn't long before two drunken recruits stumbled up to the clear doors, one of the men obviously worse off than the other, his arm draped limply over his companion's shoulder, as the first man attempted at length to retrieve his code-card. Down the hallway inside, the sentry continued reading.

The first recruit finally found his card, attempted to wave it before the card scanner, missed, tried again, and was finally successful. The doors opened, the men entered, and Sarah slipped in behind them.

The sentry forced the two men to stop and asked for their ID numbers and cards. The first man stammered out his number and produced his card. The second man, when prompted, muttered something unintelligible. The first man began digging into the second man's pockets.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Sarah walked past the sentry and the drunken men, making her way to the tunnel's end, which split into two hallways on either side. Directly in front of her were two lifts. Taking a glance backward, Sarah noticed that the more inebriated of the two men was now lying on the floor, singing at the top of his voice as the sentry and the second man attempted to lift him to his feet. She used the opportunity to press the nearest lift's call button.



Castomar, now well into his fifth drink, had begun to stoop in his seat. His eyes had become bloodshot, and he had begun speaking louder, even though Sela was sitting right next to him. Lieutenant Brock ordered the pilot another drink. As she did so, Castomar began massaging her shoulder.

At Somo's table, Tibbs had begun grinding his teeth. Somo, for his part, was busy trying to work out a conundrum that had been vexing him since their departure from Pridewater.

During this entire mission, Pollock Rimes, the man who had done nothing but bark orders incessantly and charge into the thick of battle at every given opportunity, had not made his presence known once since the incident in the mess hall. Somo figured that it was possible that Sarah had scared him that much, that he had simply given in and resigned himself to following along with the other soldiers, but Somo didn't really believe

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

that. Somo didn't believe that Pollock was capable of stepping down without a fight. As a matter of fact, it almost seemed to Somo that Pollock had gone out of his way to blend in with the rest, to fade into the background to such a point that he had unintentionally drawn attention to himself by doing so—at least in Somo's mind. *Perhaps I'm wrong*, Somo thought; *perhaps I'm just being paranoid*.

He decided he would keep a close eye on the lieutenant just the same.



The lift descended to the second level. The doors opened and Sarah exited. It had been a long time, but she was struck immediately by how little the Academy had changed. The walls, although they had been repainted, were still the same vaguely disturbing green color they had been when she was last here. She proceeded past several closed doors, some quiet, some with pounding music coming from inside the rooms, and occasionally she would hear voices. The mental presence of other telepaths was strong here—she was on the barracks level, where the recruits shared tiny rooms, sometimes two to three men per domicile. The mental bombardment was disorienting for a moment, as Sarah felt herself right in the middle of it, being jostled from all sides, like floating in the midst of a raging ocean. She set up a barrier inside her mind, using her will power to

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

mute out the swarming alpha waves. Once this was done, she continued to Area C.

All of the personnel who worked in the limited-access fields roomed in Area C. These were the men and women in charge of security (and some of the heaviest drinkers in the bunch). Once she entered this hallway, she heard a great deal more noise, and immediately spotted two open doors. The first door she came to revealed a seemingly deserted room. She heard voices emanating from the second, farther down the hall. Sarah figured the man who occupied the deserted room had just come off his rotation and was socializing with someone across the hall. Sarah entered the room.

The inside was not completely deserted, as she heard the faint, deep breathing sounds of someone fast asleep. In one corner of the room, a man slept on the top of two bunk beds. On the lower bed was one of the jackets that the security personnel wore while on duty. Inside the jacket was a code card.

I hope the rest of the mission goes this smoothly, Sarah thought as she exited the room and made her way back to the lift.



Inside the Starlite-Starbrite, Castomar was now unable to maintain focus, even on Sela, who had stopped drinking a long time ago and was now in the process of coaxing the pilot to continue (she had ordered him a double).

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Tibbs had calmed down, much to the relief of Somo, who had begun to grow slightly concerned about Sarah. He wished he had some way of knowing if she was all right.

A man, who had obviously been doing his own share of drinking, approached the table, leaning against it for support and directing his bloodshot eyes to Somo.

“You guys are miners, huh? Where from?” he asked.

“Pridewater,” Somo answered.

“Pridewater . . . wow, that’s great. I grew up there.”

Somo and Tibbs exchanged glances. The man continued: “Hey, who’s marshal now that Skoldmeier resigned?”

Somo looked to Tibbs for help. Tibbs shrugged slightly as if to say, *you’re guess is as good as mine*. The intoxicated man looked back and forth between the two, waiting for a response. Somo suddenly felt as if everyone in the pub was listening, waiting for him to give the wrong response. Of course it was silly, but the idea was not helped by the fact that a couple other men with similar haircuts were now looking at their table.

“Brodie,” Somo answered finally.

The man stared at him blankly for a moment. “You mean Brady? Stylus Brady?”

“Yep, that’s him.” Somo nodded. The man looked at Tibbs, who said, “Stylus, that’s right.”

The man looked absolutely dumbfounded. “Stylus Brady’s dead. He died three cycles ago.”

Somo began trying to think of a way out of their situ-

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

ation. Tibbs sighed heavily and shifted in his seat.

The man frowned. "At least I thought he did."

Somo threw Tibbs a questioning glance. Tibbs shrugged once again. "I just started here at the Academy. I've been going through some conditioning. . . . To tell you the truth, I don't remember things so good, like I used to, anymore."

Somo felt pity then, for this younger man who had already started losing his memories to the neural inhibitor inside his head. *Just a lost boy, really, that's all he is*, Somo thought. *But, when the time comes, he could prove useful.* The other men who had been looking toward Somo's table returned to their conversation.

★ ★ ★

Once inside the lift, Sarah punched the button for the bottom floor, the security level. In a few ticks she was there, on her way to the security control booth.

She had only actually seen the control booth on one occasion, and that was during her orientation. She did not remember exactly where it was, and walked down several corridors, eventually becoming disoriented. Every hallway looked the same, the only differentiating feature being a section number at each terminus. At one point two men approached from the other end of the hall Sarah was navigating. There were no doorways to slip into, and if Sarah tried to rush back the way she came, she would certainly make noise; so, she pressed

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

herself as tightly as possible against the corridor wall. The conversation of the men became clearer as they drew near.

“All I’m sayin’ is *somethin’s* going on. Training exercises, my ass. I don’t believe in aliens any more than the next guy. But there’s definitely *somethin’* they’re not telling us. . . .”

The man who was speaking came closer. Sarah drew in a deep breath and held it. The material on the man’s shoulder brushed against Sarah’s chest. The man wiped absently at his shoulder as he spoke, continuing on down the hall.

“Besides, if all they’re doing’s renovating, why all the secrecy? That’s all I’m saying. . . .”

The men reached the end of the hall and turned the corner. Sarah exhaled and moved once again in the opposite direction. She looked at a monitor on her wrist, which displayed how much “cloaking” time she had left. The bar was almost at zero. After wandering a few moments more, she finally came upon a circular room with a sealed, windowless three-man enclosure in the middle. It was the security control booth.

Sarah wasted no time. She waved her card before the scanner. The door to the control booth slid open and Sarah rushed inside.

The man nearest the door turned his head just in time to receive a palm strike to the point of the chin, knock-

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

ing him immediately unconscious. The next man stared, openmouthed, as he looked down at his fallen friend. Maneuvering inside the cramped space, Sarah worked her way to the man's rear, delivering a double-fisted blow to the base of his neck. He fell, but was not out. The third man had risen from his seat, stumbling backward, his eyes wide, looking around the room as if expecting the walls to suddenly come alive. Sarah wrapped both hands around the back of the man's head, yanking downward with all her strength as she shot the point of her knee up into the man's forehead. The man crumpled. Sarah turned her attention back to the second man, delivering a full-force blow to the back of his neck. The man fell onto his chest and moved no more.

Sarah closed the door and uncloaked, allowing the device time to recharge. Next, Sarah surveyed the booth and the banks of monitors and keyboards that filled nearly every inch of space. She picked out the monitors that displayed views of the main gate, the armory, and the officers' quarters. Next, Sarah began searching for any monitor that might provide a clue as to the whereabouts of the alien specimens.

Near the doorway, behind where the first man had been seated, were two monitors that displayed the recreational facilities, according to the tags above each screen. The screens themselves, however, were blank. The words "Under Renovation" were written across each

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

screen. Sarah thought back to the conversation between the two men in the hall; she believed she now knew where the experiment with the aliens was taking place . . . but it would be up to Somo and the others to find out for sure.



Somo almost jumped out of his seat when the hip communicator went off.

He and Tibbs had kept a conversation going with the young recruit. Castomar was now passed out, his head laying flat on the table. Somo stood and looked to Sela, indicating the communicator, which had a small light that was flashing green. Sela nodded. Tibbs excused himself from his conversation with the recruit, went to Sela and exchanged a few words, then kissed her and returned. Somo looked back at the table where Pollock had been seated. The lieutenant was no longer there. Looking past the dance floor toward the front of the pub, Somo saw Pollock making his way to the entrance. The others were aware that the time had come, glancing over at Somo (all except for Forest, who was still talking to the attractive young Tarsonian). They began making their way out to the street.

“You know what,” Somo confided to the recruit, “I’ve been on this planet several times and I’ve never even seen the Academy.”

The recruit’s eyes drifted for a moment, then found

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Somo's. "What? Are you serious? The main gate's like, just a few leagues away. I can't get you in but I can show you. There's a big statue and everything. Follow me."

The man led the way out of the bar, colliding with a few dancing patrons on the way out, mumbling apologies. Somo grabbed Forest—who seemed perturbed at the intrusion but acquiesced after repeated farewells to the lady—and made his exit to the front of the pub, where the others waited. The recruit looked at the eighteen gathered men somewhat apprehensively.

"You're all comin'?"

Somo intervened. "None of us have seen it. At least not when we were sober enough to remember it the next day."

The recruit smacked Somo on the shoulder, cackling. "Heh heh, yeah, sober. That's a good one. All right, assault troops, follow your leader!" With that the recruit shot out his right arm, index finger pointing forward, and stumbled in the general direction of the Academy.

★ ★ ★

Sarah's next order of business was to uncover the whereabouts of Major Rumm. She sat before the monitor displaying the hallway outside the officers' quarters, a segregated, obviously more deluxe spread of accommodations where each domicile was the size of a luxury apartment in one of Tarsonis' top hotels. This was where all officers stayed during their two-cycle assignment as

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Academy instructors, forgoing the off-post housing accommodations granted to instructors at other Confederate institutions. But after all, they lived rent-free. Most officers she had known when she served here didn't seem unhappy about it.

Sarah navigated a computer screen to find a listing of room assignments. Major Rumm resided in the largest dwelling, in section G-7. Sarah scanned the O.Q. monitors for the one displaying G-7. She soon found it. With the press of a button, she was able to review all footage that had been taken of the hall outside Rumm's quarters for the past ten intervals. It did not take long for her to come to a point in the video where Rumm could be seen entering the domicile. She paused the video there, staring at the tiny monitor that showed a shadowed face beneath a Confederate officer's hat. She felt her stomach tighten. She pushed out the memories that immediately began to surface; memories of the dying kitten with the bulging tumor, of her father, staring mindlessly from the adjacent room while Rumm, then a lieutenant, paced back and forth before her. She forced all of these memories away as she took the code cards from the unconscious security guards on the floor and began dragging them, one by one, to the latrine outside the booth and down the hall.

★ ★ ★

Outside the Academy's main gate, Somo and his group

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

stood staring at the statue of Major General Brantigan Fole.

The recruit looked up, swaying, and would have fallen if Somo had not offered a steadying hand. The man then started walking down the tunnel. "Come on, I'll show you the gate." Somo and Tibbs followed. The rest stayed near the mouth of the tunnel. The recruit approached the set of clear doors, waving at the sentry, who eyed Somo and Tibbs wearily. The sentry reached for his gun and began approaching the doors as the recruit dug inside his pockets for his code card.

The sentry arrived at the doors, holding the weapon ready. The recruit waved his card before the scanner, and waved a hand at the sentry, motioning toward Tibbs and Somo. "It's okay. They're off-world miners. Just looking." Somo and Tibbs nodded, offering the most genuine smiles they could muster. The recruit turned and shook Somo's hand. "Well, it's been great hanging with you guys. . . ." The sentry appeared to relax slightly.

Tibbs's foot launched out through the open doorway, catching the sentry square in the midsection. The man folded over, dropping his weapon. Tibbs rained a heavy fist down onto the back of the man's head and the sentry collapsed. Somo looked at the recruit, who stared back in bafflement. "Sorry," he said as he grabbed the recruit's hair and rammed his head forward into the clear section of barrier just above the scanner.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

The rest of the group flooded down the hallway and through the gate. Somo and Tibbs grabbed the sentry. Forest and Pollock took the recruit. Another soldier grabbed the sentry's gun and a portable wordlink from the sentry's post. Together, they dashed toward the lifts at the end of the hall.

★ ★ ★

Sarah watched the main gate events transpire from inside the booth. The three security personnel were now locked inside the latrine (short-circuiting the automatic doors was actually very simple, once you knew how) and Somo and the others had finally made it inside the gate. Sarah tracked their progress as they entered the two lifts. She began typing a message on a nearby keypad to the sentry's wordlink. Once she finished, she disabled all of the monitors and used the emergency override to render the security doors outside the armory, recreation areas and officers' quarters sector inoperative. She then left the booth to begin searching for Major Rumm.

★ ★ ★

Inside the lift, the soldier who had grabbed the wordlink flipped up the top, which doubled as an LCD screen. A message began appearing.

"Got it," he said to the others. Tibbs was in the process of removing the sentry's clothes. The rest were stepping out of their overalls, under which they had worn the

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

same kind of “off duty” clothes that recruits would wear on a night out. Somo grabbed the sentry’s shirt and began putting it on. A hand shot out and grabbed his arm. The hand belonged to Pollock.

“Hold fast, soldier. I’ll take over the sentry’s position.”

Somo looked at Pollock quizzically. “That wasn’t the plan—”

“I’ve decided it will be easier this way. In the absence of Lieutenant Kerrigan, I’m still the senior ranking officer. Now hand me that jacket.”

Somo pulled his arm out of the jacket sleeve and offered it to Pollock, who began putting it on as the lift reached level H, the trash collection and cleaning supply storage level. “The rest of you continue as planned. You know where I’ll be. Come get me when the time comes.” Pollock slipped on the sentry’s pants, then boots. He took the sentry’s gun and hat as the rest stepped out onto the third level, hauling the unconscious Confederates with them. Pollock hit the button for the top level. Somo watched as the lift’s doors slid closed.

Tibbs and three of the others dragged the bodies toward a large swing-open door in the wall, a rubbish chute. “This is gonna stink, but you’ll thank us later,” Tibbs offered as he dropped the recruit in. One of the soldiers stepped up on another’s knee and removed one of the overhead ceiling tiles. The others handed their overalls to the man, who stashed them in the ceiling. All the

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

while, Somo kept looking back at the lift where Pollock had gone back up to the top level.

None of Pollock's behavior made sense, and it unnerved Somo to a large degree. He had done absolutely nothing all night, displayed no desire to assume leadership, until it came time to replace the sentry. All of a sudden he steps up out of nowhere and changes the plan. Somo didn't like it. Something about Pollock's behavior just didn't feel right, and Somo intended to do something about it.

Having disposed of the two bodies, the soldiers reentered the lift. Tibbs was busy looking at the message Sarah had typed into the wordlink. He turned to Somo. "She gave us the section numbers to both the armory and some recreation area. She must think that's where the specimens are." Somo nodded. The lift descended to L level. The doors opened. The others stepped out as the rest of the group stepped out onto the level from the adjacent lift. Somo grabbed Tibbs's arm before he could leave.

"I'm going back up," he said.

"What?"

"Something's not right about the way Pollock's acting. If I'm wrong, I'll catch up with you guys. If I'm right . . . well, if I'm right we could be in trouble if someone doesn't do something."

Tibbs looked deep into Somo's eyes, saw he was seri-

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

ous, and nodded. "Okay. The armory's in section L-14. We'll meet you there."



Sarah's plan was simple: to enter the first lift she came to and ascend to G level. The problem was, she was lost. On an ordinary mission when she had been an assassin for the Confederacy, a map readout in her field of vision, displayed against the left lens of her goggles, would have provided any necessary topical information. In this case, however, the intelligence was not available to create a map, and she was on her own.

After reaching the end of a seemingly endless hallway, Sarah arrived at a computer room. She turned around, making her way back to the intersection where she had entered. She went the opposite way this time, and was eventually rewarded with the sight of a lift. Unfortunately, one man was standing inside the lift, holding the door, while the other was standing outside, talking. Sarah was cloaked; but she could not get past the man inside the lift; there simply wasn't enough room. So, once that person finished his conversation, Sarah had to wait as the first man ascended and the second man left before she could call the lift back down again.



When Somo returned to the top level and stepped out of the lift, his worst fears were realized: Pollock was

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

nowhere in sight. The sentry post was vacated, which was bad enough in itself, but what was worse was that Pollock was roaming free inside the facility, with a security code card and a weapon. Somo turned and looked at the readout above the second lift. It was currently stopped at the Security Level. Somo could suddenly feel his heart pounding inside his chest. Somo felt certain that the lieutenant meant to sabotage the mission, and unless someone stopped him, Pollock would succeed.

★ ★ ★

If only that boot-licking doctor hadn't screwed it all up the first time, Pollock thought, things never would have gotten this far. After he had sent the message to the *Norad II*, it had been Pollock's plan to take a separate lift, leading the Confederate soldiers around the port side of the ship and circumventing the trap. Then the soldiers could have arrested Mengsk and hopefully killed that intransigent cur of a woman whom the general had become taken with. That's the way it *should* have happened. But the good doctor had met them in the bay, and inadvertently took them up to the starboard side and led them directly into the trap. Moron. Now Pollock had to do his best to clean things up if he still expected to come out of this a Confederate hero. It would be difficult, and required perfect timing and more than just a little luck. But Pollock certainly figured his odds to be better than that of the others.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

He had taken a different route than that which Sarah had taken not long before him, and after only a few wrong turns, he made it to the security control booth. *Things are looking up already*, Pollock thought. Using the sentry's code card, Pollock accessed the booth. All of the surveillance systems had been sabotaged, but that mattered little. Pollock immediately tripped the silent alarm system located near the door, sat down at the central computer, and began typing.

★ ★ ★

Tibbs, Forest, and the others reached the Armory without a hitch. Inside they found several gauss rifles, a host of fragmentation grenades, as well as harnesses, holsters, and of course, canister rifles. Most of them had never seen canister rifles, and didn't know how to use them, so they grabbed the gauss rifles. Forest donned a harness and packed in as many fragmentation grenades as he could carry. Tibbs decided one gauss rifle wasn't enough and opted to carry two.

Tibbs looked down the corridor for any sign of Somo. There was none. He hoped the private was okay, but knew that they could not afford to wait. Somo knew the plan. He could catch up to them in the recreation area.

Within moments the rebels were outside the Armory on their way back to the lift. So far, they had not been spotted. Tibbs only hoped that their luck would continue to hold.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING



The officers' quarters were laid out inside a sector that almost resembled a miniature city in itself. Walkways led between the detached buildings, which even had small "backyards" with chairs and tables. Sarah had never been to this sector, and had taken some time to get here, since G sector was located well away from anything having to do with the enlisted men. *The officers of the Ghost Academy may be forced to live on base, but they certainly aren't being slighted*, Sarah thought as she made her way past several of these buildings, some with lights still on, others with snoring sounds emanating from open windows. She made her way to the far side of the sector and found the major's residence there, nestled in the corner. A flagpole stood in front of the house waving the Confederate flag. Sarah approached cautiously, alert for any signs of movement. The lights within the domicile were off.

Sarah approached one of the front windows and peeked in through the drapes. A small amount of light was cast on the living room area from a wordlink on a nearby table. The back of the device was facing her so she could not read the words on the screen. She flipped a switch on her belt and her goggles immediately shifted to infrared vision. There were no heat sources emanating from within the building. Sarah switched back to normal vision and crossed to the home's front door.

Incredibly, there next to the door, on a digitized mes-

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

sage pad, was a note. It read: *Out to training area, section P-4 at 03:00*. Sarah checked her timepiece. It read *02:55*. It seemed strange to Sarah that the major would be doing anything in the training area at this particular time, but nothing the military did ever really surprised her. Could it be some kind of trap? How could the major possibly know? Sarah found herself suddenly wishing she had a way of contacting the others. The fact that Tarsonis held some of the most sophisticated de-scrambling communications surveillance technology in the world did not help their situation any. It had left them cut off from Mengsk, and effectively cut off from each other.

Despite all of this, Sarah made her way to the nearest lift and punched the button for section P, hoping that she was not walking into an ambush.



Somo, once he made it to the security level, ended up retracing nearly the exact same route Sarah had navigated before him. The security level was a virtual labyrinth of hallways. At one point Somo rounded a corner and stopped in his tracks as he saw a security officer approaching from the other end. The officer was intent on the digital clipboard he held before him, and had taken no notice of Somo. Somo slipped back the way he had come and darted down a side alley just as the man reached the intersection and went in the opposite direction.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Somo decided to continue down the corridor in which he presently found himself. At the end of it was a sealed doorway. Somo had no idea how he would get through any secured doors; he hoped that Sarah had disabled all of them, but he knew she probably hadn't. For now, all he could do was hope that he found Pollock before the lieutenant did anything to jeopardize the mission.

Once at the end of the hall, Somo waved his hand in front of the scanner beside the door. There was no response. The door was locked. Just as Somo was about to turn around to try to find another way, however, the door slid open.

Standing on the other side, wearing a look of surprise on his face, was Pollock Rimes.



Tibbs, Forest, and the rest of the rebels were heading toward the recreation area. As they rounded the corner just before the entrance, they noticed two sentries flanking the doorway. One of the men frowned, making no attempt to raise his weapon. The second man was quicker to react; he immediately shouted for the soldiers to identify themselves, even as he began raising his gauss rifle.

Tibbs did not wait for the second man to take aim. He began firing immediately, knowing that the noise may draw attention (the gauss rifles were nowhere near as loud as the canister rifles, but the spikes they fired

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

tended to create quite a racket when they ricocheted), but also knowing that they had little choice. The man who had raised his weapon was pinned to the wall by the gunfire, hanging there for a moment, his arms outstretched, before sliding to the floor. The first man simply looked at his comrade in shock and disbelief.

Tibbs and the others knew that they had come to a point where lives could no longer be spared if they were to make it out in one piece. Tibbs turned his weapon on the first sentry and fired a final burst.

Once at the doorway Tibbs waved his hand before the scanner. The doors opened. Sarah had done her job. Forest stopped for a moment, looking down at the dead sentries before he joined the others filing through the doorway into the recreation area.



Major Rumm sat at a wordlink inside one of the training center's control booths, wondering if he would turn out to be the victim of some cruel practical joke. He kept repeating, over and over in his head, the emergency message that accompanied the alarm that had woken him from a fairly pleasant sleep. It had read: *The Academy is being attacked. There are several rebels en route to recreation area and a Ghost on her way to you. Get out now and take action before it is too late.*

The first thing the major did was to check the source of the message. It was sent from the security control booth.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Likewise, the silent alarm had been triggered at the booth. Even then, the major was not convinced that the Academy had been infiltrated. What he found more likely was that some drunken security officer thought it would be fun to get cute with his superiors—until, of course, Major Rumm typed a message to the sentry at the main gate and received no reply.

At that point it would have been easy to deliver an emergency message to the Battalion Command Center requesting a dispatch of soldiers. But, if the whole thing turned out to be a hoax, the major would be the one who would look like the idiot. Besides, the purpose of the Academy was to train the deadliest soldiers in all the known systems. They could handle their own problems.

That was why Major Rumm dispatched a message to several Ghost officers (who had already been awakened by the alarm) to suit up, retrieve their weapons from the Armory, and proceed to the recreation area.

The tricky part was the infiltrating Ghost. Was he one of theirs? He would have to be. The Academy was the only place that trained Ghosts, although the major had checked and no rogue operatives appeared on his tracker, meaning the Ghost no longer possessed its neural inhibitor. These thoughts had passed through the major's head as he left the note on the message board outside his door (an admittedly amateur ploy, but the only thing the major could think of at the time) and pro-

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

ceeded to the training area. Here was the only place he knew of where he could possibly set a trap.

Now as he waited, he continued to ponder the identity of the invisible spy. Perhaps one of the recruits had a breakdown as a result of the resocialization. But the message had mentioned *rebels*. The major knew that a Ghost had been deployed by the *Norad II* to retrieve . . . Kerrigan. It couldn't be. It wasn't possible—or was it? *What an interesting possibility*, he thought as he waited. He did not want to call for backup, not until he knew exactly who or what he was dealing with.



The training section took up two levels, P being the uppermost. It was here that Sarah stepped out of the lift and proceeded into an expansive, open space. Set into the wall on the far side of the room were clear doors that led to a small chamber, followed by another set of clear doors, and beyond that . . . Major Rumm.

He sat at a terminal near what looked like a control booth, ostensibly absorbed in his work. To Sarah's right was a railing where the floor dropped off into a massive intake shaft that spanned the width of the room. She could not remember participating in any training exercises on this level, so the surroundings were foreign to her. Still, there seemed to be no concealment from which to stage an ambush, being that the area was open and devoid of cover. Sarah switched to infrared. The

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

only heat sources she detected were from machinery in the walls. She furtively made her way toward the first set of doors.

As she drew nearer, she recognized more of the major's features. He was far older, but his eyes had remained the same. There was no doubt in Sarah's mind that he was the one; the one who had threatened her invalid father and subjected her to a full cycle of mind games and psychological terror. She felt her adrenaline surge, her view narrowing to tunnel vision, locked on his face. She continued forward, past the first set of doors into what appeared to be some kind of small chamber, focusing all of her intent on the man in the uniform.

She read something disturbing in his thoughts then: suspicion, awareness of danger, and she realized that he knew.

But it was already too late.

She felt a crunching under her foot and heard the sound of fragmenting glass. She looked down, seeing the tiny shards, littered over the floor just inside the first set of doors. Major Rumm's head shot up. He hit a button at the terminal and the doors nearest him slid shut. Sarah turned, just as the doors behind her came to a close. She was trapped. The major looked into the room as he stood and made his way to the control booth. Inside the booth was a small, circular window where Major Rumm con-

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

tinued to look out into the chamber as he worked the booth's controls.

Sarah had just enough time to wonder what was happening when the floor opened up beneath her.



Pollock Rimes recovered from his surprise at seeing Somo with remarkable speed, raising his weapon and taking aim at Somo's chest. Somo grasped the barrel of the rifle and pushed it aside as Pollock fired. Turning, Somo shot an open hand full-force into the lieutenant's face. Pollock fell back, and Somo, not wanting to release his grip on the weapon and unable to wrench it from the other man's grasp, fell with him.

Somo reared backward and cocked his fist for a downward strike. Pollock kicked inward with his left leg, bringing his right knee up and across Somo's stomach, knocking the rebel off balance. Somo rolled, still gripping the weapon tightly, now with both hands. Pollock yanked backward on the rifle so hard it flew from his grasp, colliding with the now-closed doorway behind them and clattering to the floor.

Pollock stood. As he did so, Somo grabbed both of the man's ankles, pressing his knees inward and thrusting his hips up as he pulled. Pollock hit the floor tailbone-first, grimacing in pain. Somo reared a leg back and stomped at Pollock's face. Pollock spun in time to avoid the blow, crawling on his stomach toward the weapon as

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Somo desperately clutched at Pollock's ankles.

Pollock's fingers reached the barrel just as Somo bolted to a crouching stand. Pollock swung the weapon around, smashing it into the side of Somo's knee. Somo groaned through clenched teeth and collapsed as Pollock shifted the gauss rifle into a firing position.



Tibbs and the others walked into a renovated area that now housed several small chambers, all sealed, with a purplish, pulsating substance in each that covered the walls. Something on the windows prevented the material from covering the glass, allowing the rebels to look inside each chamber.

Forest approached one of the chambers at the far end of the section. Looking inside he saw what appeared to be a large insect, almost some kind of maggot. Forest reached his hand out to the glass, and then drew it back as his fingertips touched the scalding-hot pane. "Youch!" he yelped. "Whatever you do, don't put your hands on the glass."

So that's what keeps this mess off of the windows, Tibbs thought. Through the glass before him, he watched as a multilegged bug crawled from an aperture in the wall, into the chamber, approaching the glass.

This is what everyone's so worried about? he thought. *They don't look like much to me.*

"All right," Tibbs said, "let's do what we came to do."

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Tibbs raised his weapon to fire into the chamber. Just then a chorus of noises rang out, echoing inside the cavernous room. *Cha-chink! Cha-chink! Cha-chink*—the sound of numerous canister rifles being cocked at once. The rebels began glancing around in every direction, but there was no one in sight. The voice of a Ghost came to them from somewhere in the room.

“Drop your weapons and kick them toward the door,” the voice advised.

Everyone in the room stood still, waving their weapons back and forth, looking to each other for guidance.

“We will fire upon you. Drop your weapons now.”

Tibbs knew that if they surrendered here, they would be tried and put to death for sedition, so he took his best guess as to where the Ghost voice was coming from and began firing.



Sarah fell into a wide, cylindrical cell. She saw the floor beneath her and had no idea of how she might break her fall, when suddenly, her body stopped plummeting, like a weight at the end of a string. Glancing around her, she saw twinkling flashes—the falling glass, also suspended. It was like being surrounded by thousands of tiny stars. She continued to fall, but agonizingly slowly; she was floating, and she instantly knew where she was: she was inside the zero-gravity training cell,

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

one of the harsh environment simulators that all Ghosts qualified in; except when she had gone through the exercise as a cadet, she had entered from the bottom, not the top where the control booth was.

She glided effortlessly down; unsure of why the major had decided to use this place to ensnare her, or what exactly his intentions were. As her toes finally brushed the cell's floor, she found out.

She felt an unstoppable force drawing her downward, and realized that the gravity inside the cell could be controlled. Right now, the gravity was being increased. Sarah fell to her knees, and then was forced to lie on her stomach as the downward G-forces became stronger. If the pull continued, she would soon be unable to move, and soon after, her bones would be crushed.

On top of all that, Sarah knew that it wouldn't be very long before she uncloaked.

★ ★ ★

Somo angled to the side even as Pollock began firing. He brought his weight forward, stretching his right hand up to the lieutenant's face. He felt sure that he was going to die at this point, and he vowed to do everything within his power to take Pollock Rimes with him.

With Somo on top of him, Pollock didn't have much room to maneuver, but he still had enough to do damage. Somo felt the spikes of the gauss rifle tearing chunks from his ribs on the right side and chipping away pieces

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

of bone; but even though Pollock had the rifle, Somo still had weapons of his own. He brought his forefinger and thumb up to Pollock's eyes and thrust down.

Pollock screamed as Somo felt the skin at the inner corners of the lieutenant's eyes give way. In his pain and shock, Pollock finally released the rifle, scrambling on all fours, scurrying away, desperately pressing against his unseeing eyes with the palms of his hands.

Somo rolled to his left and turned the rifle around. As Pollock turned and stood, hands still pressed to his face, Somo engaged the trigger. Pollock danced backward as the spikes ripped through his chest and spewed gore out his back. The lieutenant finally struck the door, then turned and fell to his side, emitting gurgling noises from his throat, the bloody remains of his eyes staring wide. He shook for a brief moment and then lay still.



Tibbs thought that he had gotten at least one of them. There was gunfire in all directions, spikes ricocheting off of walls, and sometimes, Tibbs thought he could see intermittent muzzle flashes from the canister rifles. He aimed for one of these, and saw his spikes simply disappear. *Good, he thought. I know I got one.* He heard a cocking noise so close to him that it was audible even above the cacophony of gunfire that filled the massive room, and he knew it was over.

Forest fell back to the rear wall, firing on either side.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

He saw Tibbs's back rupture outward. The dark-skinned man fell to his knees, then onto his side. Four other rebels were down. Forest began shouting for them to fall back. On Forest's right was a door. He began making his way toward it, still firing on either side, shouting for the others to join him.

The group closest to Forest glanced over their shoulders and retreated toward the wall. The Ghosts weren't firing as much now; they were picking their shots carefully, which scared Forest even more. He and eight others made it finally to the door. Forest reached out and waved his hand before the scanner—but nothing happened.

The door was locked.



Sarah could feel her body being flattened, pressed against the floor as if by a giant unseen hand. Then there was a voice. It was the voice of Major Rumm, of course, confident and pleased, self-assured and inquisitive.

"Show yourself, and tell me who you are," the voice demanded.

Sarah tried desperately to get a sense of her surroundings. The door was to her left, within sight, but still at the edge of the room. Five or six paces at most that might just as well have been fifty or sixty leagues.

"I am quite sure that you are aware of the hopelessness of your situation. Your friends are likewise endan-

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

gered. I would say that by now they are most likely dead.”

Sarah tried to tell herself that he was lying, that the others were safe; but if *she* had walked in to a trap . . .

“I am growing weary of these games. Why don’t you just reveal yourself? There is still a chance for the courts to decide your fate.”

Sarah felt an increase in the G-forces. It was now becoming incredibly difficult to breathe.

“This is the last time I will make the request. De-cloak and show me your face.”

A warning flashed in Sarah’s upper left field of vision then. She was about to uncloak whether she liked it or not. The warning flashed critical and then disappeared. She was visible.

There was a moment of silence, and then the sound of a very satisfied voice, like honey: “Well, well . . . I do believe we’ve met.”

★ ★ ★

Somo had taken Pollock’s code card and limped to the security booth. Inside, he was able to discover where Sarah had cut off the main feed to the monitors. He restored it. He felt himself becoming light-headed, and knew that he was losing blood; but he also knew that as long as there was a chance the others were still alive, he must do everything within his power to help.

A look at the recreation area monitor confirmed his

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

worst fears. There was a firefight raging. Somo felt his heart sink as he watched Tibbs collapse to the ground in a pool of blood. As much as he hated to, he tore his eyes away from the scene to look for any signs of Sarah. There was some scattered activity in a few of the hallways, some aimless scurrying, but nothing that gave any indication where—

Then he saw a video monitor displaying a view of one of the control booths in the training area. He saw a man in a Confederate uniform at a computer terminal. The man was looking down at a monitor and talking. Somo punched a series of keys on the pad below the monitor until another screen next to it began changing views: one of a weight-lifting room, another of an indoor track, and then . . . an empty, cylindrical room, and to Somo's amazement, he saw Sarah appear right before his eyes. She seemed to be pinned to the floor. He saw her hand move ever so slightly, and he knew that she was alive.

So now, Somo was faced with an impossible decision: help Sarah, or try to save the others. A tag above the monitor he was now looking at told him Sarah was in section G-7. He took a last desperate look at the monitor showing the recreation area. A computer screen below showed an overhead map of the room. On the monitor, the rebels had fallen back to a door that they could not seem to get through. Somo looked at the computer screen, hit arrow keys until the door at the back of the

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

room was highlighted, and simply continued punching keys until the door changed from a grayed-out white to green. He then watched as the doors opened and the rebels ran through. Satisfied that he had done what he could, he fought off the urge to simply lie down and go to sleep and set out to find Sarah.



Miraculously, the door behind Forest and the remaining rebels opened on its own. Without bothering to wonder how, the old man yelled to the others and fell back into the hallway.

At least in here they can only come at us two at a time, he thought, and only from one direction.

Two of the rebels near the door fell. The men directly in front of Forest began retreating. The group came to an elbow in the hall that led to another long corridor. Two more men fell before they made the turn.

Aside from Forest, there were now two soldiers left. The corridor dead-ended at a closed door, a door marked with a hazard symbol, but at least it appeared that it did not require a code card to open. Forest and the two rebels reached the door, which slid open automatically. There was a blast, and one of the men fell.

Forest backed up to a large tank, and he realized that he was in a room housing one of the Academy's power reactors. The last man crumpled from a shot to the back just as he entered the doorway. Forest pressed against

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

the tank, knowing that the Ghosts could not fire at him without blowing them all to bits.

The old man held his ground as one by one, the Ghosts around him began to de-cloak.

★ ★ ★

Inside the cell, Sarah found that the G-forces had abated somewhat, at least allowing her to breathe.

The maddening, rambling voice of the major continued. "I only know of one female Ghost who is unaccounted for; who may have been exposed to someone with the resources and audacity to try and pull off a stunt like this. I know it's you, Sarah. I've eased the pressure a little. Why don't you turn and look upward so I can see you?"

Sarah knew that she was in a desperate situation; but she also knew that the last thing she wanted to do was give this human pile of waste the pleasure of seeing her face.

"I remember when you were just a little girl. I remember the hard time you gave me then. That was a time when neural resocialization wasn't proven yet, and I wanted to avoid it if possible; but in the end you left me little choice. I also remember your father . . ."

Sarah found herself desperately wishing that the major was in the same room with her. Even if she couldn't physically harm him, she knew that if he was in the room she could reach out with her mind and—

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

“That one wasn’t my call either. Your father died on his own, of course, didn’t need the Confederacy’s help to do that. I did what I could on your behalf, you know, I really did, but in the end I think you got what you deserved. Now why don’t you show me your face before one of my recruits arrives and takes you into custody?”

Sarah desperately tried to crawl, but it was no use. She was immobilized. All she could do now was wait.



Somo moved with the kind of single-minded determination that only a dying man can muster. Even with a nearly useless right leg, he managed to hobble to the nearest lift, and make his way to G level.

As he entered G-7 he saw two sets of clear doors and beyond that, a control booth with a small round window. The head of a Confederate officer inside the booth bolted up at Somo’s entrance. Somo raised his weapon. The man inside the booth hurriedly punched buttons, then took cover as Somo fired.

The glass around the doors shattered. Somo moved forward. He entered some kind of chamber with what looked like a trapdoor under his feet. He moved through the second shattered wall of the chamber, pointed his weapon into the control booth, and fired off a full burst.

Looking to the other side of the room, Somo saw handrails leading down into some kind of open chasm. He went to the edge, where he found an enclosed ladder,

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

and began descending to the next level.

★ ★ ★

Forest watched the five remaining Ghosts de-cloak. They stood surrounding him in a semicircle, canister rifles pointed at his chest. They began to close in.

The old man pulled two fragmentation grenades from the harness he wore. The Ghosts paused, and then began to step backward.

Forest offered an imperfect smile, looking to each soldier and nodding. He saw recognition of what he was about to do from some of them; recognition and fear, and that was reward enough.

“My mother, may she welcome me with open arms, used to say, ‘There ain’t nothin’ worth livin’ fer that ain’t worth dyin’ fer.’”

With that Forest pulled the pins on each grenade, and before the Ghosts could rush in to stop him, released both clips.

★ ★ ★

Sarah felt the weight on her body simply dissipate. She heard muffled rifle fire. Weakly rising up on her hands and knees, she looked upward. The doors at the top of the cell were closed. She shook her head, desperately trying to regain her strength. She was finding it difficult to stand.

A moment passed as Sarah waited. There was a tremendous *boom!* that shook the entire structure. She

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

thought it must have come from above. Then, the door at the edge of the cell slid open. Sarah looked up to see Somo standing in the doorway. He was badly wounded, and favoring his left leg, but he was smiling, glad to see her alive. "We'd better get out of here," he said.

"The door—" Sarah croaked. Even speaking was still difficult. She tried with all her might to stand, and finally rose up on shaky legs. "Get away from the—"

Sarah heard the report of small-arms fire from the room outside. Somo's smile faded as he looked down at his chest, where blood began to spread across the fabric of his shirt. Somo fell forward.

Stumbling to where he lay, Sarah retrieved his weapon. Major Rumm appeared in the doorway just long enough to see that Sarah possessed superior firepower, and then disappeared. Sarah fired a burst anyway, and then returned her attention to Somo, gently turning him onto his back, laying his head on her arm.

Somo tried to smile. "I screwed up. Sorry. It was a tough decision, but in the end there really was no choice. . . ." Sarah was unsure what Somo meant, not knowing of his decision to come to Sarah's aid at the expense of the others. "You know I'm in lo—" Somo exhaled and Sarah felt his body go slack. Sarah did not need to be a telepath to understand what he had wanted to say. She knew; of course she knew that Somo had been in love with her, and she so desperately wanted to

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

tell him that she knew, and that she had held for him the deepest feelings possible; that what she felt for him was even greater than love, but it was too late; the essence of what had made the man in her arms Somo Hung was gone.

All her pity, all her sorrow, all her despondency was replaced then by rage, and by pure, unfettered primordial hate. In that moment, Sarah forsook all within her that was human and became a predatory beast. The only thing that mattered now was the kill.

Suddenly galvanized, Lieutenant Kerrigan snatched up the weapon at Somo's side and raced from the cell.



The bottom of the cell connected to a guardwalk that led out to the far wall, then across to an "open" lift that, unlike the others, attached to a track in the wall of the chasm. This lift was now moving upward. Sarah knew that Major Rumm was inside. She also knew that a Ghost was approaching her on the guardwalk. Her concentration was so acutely focused in this state that she could pinpoint him exactly.

As the Ghost cocked his canister rifle Sarah took a step forward and shot out her hand, wedging it in the man's throat. She placed a hand at the back of his head and pulled, smashing her elbow into the man's face. She felt his nose crack like an eggshell. Gripping the weapon with one hand she pulled the man by his hair, over the

STARCRRAFT: UPRISING

railing, dropping him into the seemingly bottomless steel pit.

All canister rifles fired not only high explosive projectiles, but were also capable of firing “lockdown” rounds, concentrated EMPs that shorted out any electrical device or vehicle they struck. Sarah raised the rifle, took a bead on the lift, and fired. The round hit its mark; the lift froze halfway up the wall, enclosed in a field of crackling energy.

★ ★ ★

Inside the lift, Rumm suddenly felt that matters had taken a major turn for the worse. He waited, listening intently, repeatedly hitting the top-level button on the lift, to no avail. Suddenly the repair hatch at the top of the structure flipped open. Rumm fired several shots into the lift’s ceiling, then waited.

He barely heard Sarah’s feet hit the floor when his gun flew from his grasp. She had recharged enough to cloak once again, even if only temporarily. The major tried to put his back to the wall but he was on the floor of the lift before he could move. He felt an immense pain in his head then, a swelling. It felt as if his brain was expanding, pressing against the insides of his skull. He felt fire racing through a vein in his forehead and along his brow. The major began to scream.

Sarah did not stop her mental assault, even after Major Rumm’s eyes exploded from their sockets.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING



After her business in the lift was done, Sarah used the major's tracker to find Ghost No. 24718. She found him, uncloaked, in what was left of the recreation area, unconscious from a spike wound to the head. She also found the remains of her fellow soldiers. An entire section of the far wall was gone, and the alien creatures there had been destroyed. There were a few left in the cells against the remaining wall. Sarah went to one of these and looked inside. She felt the calling, the beckoning she had vaguely felt from the creature once before; it seemed stronger now in her current, feral state. As she watched, the maggot-like creature rolled into a ball. It began to pulsate, forming into an egg-like sac. It was becoming something else, mutating into its next stage. And it was calling to her.

Sarah had seen enough. She fired through the glass, rupturing the egg inside, killing it once and for all. She then fired explosive rounds from the canister rifle into each remaining cell, setting the substance inside on fire.

She cloaked, took the Ghost, activated his cloaking device, hauled him over her shoulder and took a lift to the top level, making her way out through the main gate and to the rendezvous point with Sela's transport.



The news of the deaths of the others—especially Tibbs—struck Sela hard. She did not speak as she guided

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

the transport up and out of Tarsonis' atmosphere. The small craft was hailed several times, first by Flight Control and then by Sector Patrol as they made their way from the planet. The Confederacy would of course send Wraiths to intercept the vehicle, but it made no difference, since the *Hyperion* warped in long enough for the transport to board (and for Mengsk to send a brief message), then warped out again.

★ ★ ★

Sarah brought Ghost No. 24718 to the bridge. He went willingly enough, still dazed from his head wound.

When Arcturus Mengsk saw the younger man, he temporarily seemed to forget everything else: the deaths of the other rebels, the destruction of the Academy and the eradication of the aliens. The Ghost stared back at Mengsk, waiting. The general turned to Sarah. "I'm sorry about your comrades. They were all noble, courageous warriors who died for—"

"I don't really want to hear it right now," Sarah blurted.

Mengsk nodded, then motioned for the Ghost to sit in his command chair. The man obeyed. The general turned to the lookout and began to speak once again: "Not long after I ended my service in the Confederacy, something happened to me; my life's great catastrophe, as I often describe it to myself. You see my father, Angus, was a revolutionary. Back then I didn't share his views,

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

but he caused quite a stir among the people around him. The Confederacy considered him a threat . . . and they had him assassinated.”

Mengsk turned, staring at the man in the chair. “Three Ghosts were tasked to complete the job. Sarah killed one of them on this very vessel not long ago. You, No. 24718, were one of the three. You probably don’t even remember doing it. That’s why I wanted to tell you before you died.”

The general drew his side arm and fired a single shot into the man’s chest. The soldier put his hand to the wound, his eyes drifting. He slumped forward and onto the floor.

Sarah felt the rage within her surfacing once again. “All of this, since the beginning, has been some kind of personal vendetta? You used me . . . you used all of us!”

“The targets I chose were military targets, and their destruction will aid the revolution greatly. But, I admit that certain of those choices were made for personal reasons.”

Sarah clenched her fists. “I’m tired of being used. I’ve been putting up with it my whole life and I’m done. Whoever the third Ghost is, you can find him on your own.”

Sarah turned to leave. “I already found the third Ghost. Quite a while ago, on a dust-bowl planet called Vyctor 5. That Ghost, the most important of the three,

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

the one who killed my father, is you, Sarah.”

Sarah froze. Memories rushed unbidden into her mind: the ascent up the staircase, the stalking into the bedroom, the form lying on the bed. She saw herself yanking the figure to his feet, slicing the blade across his throat, saw him stumbling back into the moonlight revealing . . . revealing features remarkably similar to the man standing behind her, the features only a relative could share. He was older, gray-haired, but he had Arcturus’s same eyes, the same hawkish nose.

“It’s true. I originally traced you to Vycor 5 to have you brought aboard and killed. But then I decided that you might serve better as an ally. Yes, I decided to use you to get to the others, to infiltrate the Academy, but somewhere in the course of it all I came to see you as the singular, incredible person that you are. You gave me hope, Sarah.”

Sarah’s eyes had begun to well with tears. “And that’s something worth fighting for.”

“Yes, and worth dying for, Sergeant Keel might have said.”

Sarah turned to face Mengsk then. She felt no animosity toward the other man, no enmity.

“I forgive you, Sarah. I forgive you for killing my father. But that won’t make any difference until you’re able to forgive yourself.”

Sarah’s face tightened; she began to cry, letting out

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

emotions that she had kept bottled within her for so long, emotions that she was unsure how to deal with. For now, she just needed to get away.

“Thank you, sir,” she said. Unable or unwilling to say more, at least for now, she turned and left the bridge.

Mengsk returned to his chair, pushing aside the body of the young Ghost. He pressed a button and a vidmonitor lowered. A UNN report came to life on the screen as a reporter began to speak.

“Breaking news: the Confederate regime here on Tarsonis has been rocked by an assault on one of its core facilities, an academy for the training of elite soldiers. Just moments after the strike we received a transmission from a rebel leader taking credit for the action.” Mengsk’s face filled the screen then. “Let it be known that freedom will not perish; that we will fight until the very last man to topple the Confederacy and that we are responsible for the destruction at the Tarsonis Ghost Academy.” There was a pause then, a jump where Mengsk had mentioned something about a secret being kept from Tarsonis’ citizens. The message concluded: “We are The Sons of Korhal.”

Mengsk smiled. *Finally*, he thought. *Finally a message that got through*. The road ahead would be hard. The Confederacy would fight back, but Mengsk would not stop until they fell. The general believed they had not seen the last of the aliens. But for now, all was well.

STARCRAFT: UPRISING

Arcturus leaned back in his seat. The reporter then came back on. "There you have it, a communication delivered to us through Confederate channels, obviously edited for content at some point, but the unshakable truth is that today a deadly blow has been dealt to the once untouchable empire that was the Confederacy."

Behind the reporter was a wall where a symbol had been spray-painted: a black arm holding a whip in its fist, the whip forming a circle around the arm. "Student uprisings have begun taking place in several universities all across Tarsonis. In this reporter's humble opinion, perhaps it is a portent of things to come. Reporting for Universe News Network, this is Michael Daniel Liberty, signing off. . . ."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Micky Neilson was first published in *Amazing Stories* with his short story "Hybrid." *Uprising* is his second published work.

For the past six years, Micky and his writing partner, Sam Didier, have been writing screenplays. Their script *The Hunt* was a semifinalist in the L.A. Independent Film Festival's Production Grant Program.

Micky and his fiancée, Tiffany Kahlke, live in sunny Mission Viejo, California.