

LBRIS | We know
books

TO
SLEEP
IN A
SEA OF
STARS

C H R I S T O P H E R
P A O L I N I



CONTENTS

PART ONE: EXOGENESIS 13

Dreams	17
Reliquary	28
<i>Extenuating Circumstances</i>	45
Anguish	60
Madness	67
Shouts & Echoes	84
Countdown	96
Out & About	104
Choices	111
★	
Exeunt I	132

PART TWO: SUBLIMARE 141

Awakening	145
<i>Wallfish</i>	160
Assumptions	179
<i>Kriegsspiel</i>	204
Extremis	217
Near & Far	226
Icons & Indications	245
Nowhere to Hide	261
Graceling	270
<i>Darmstadt</i>	280
Exposure	298
Lessons	319
★	
Exeunt II	350

PART THREE: APOCALYPSIS 357

Past Sins	361
<i>A Caelo Usque ad Centrum</i>	393
Shards	399
Terror	417
<i>Sic Itur ad Astra</i>	429

Into the Dark	439
Necessity	452
Sins of the Present	474

*

Exeunt III	491
------------	-----

PART FOUR : FIDELITATIS 517

Dissonance	521
Orsted Station	541
Escape!	555
Necessity II	590

*

Exeunt IV	606
-----------	-----

PART FIVE: MALIGNITATEM 629

Arrival	633
Necessity III	646
<i>Integratum</i>	669
<i>Ferro Comitante</i>	693
<i>Astrorum Irae</i>	718
<i>Sub Specie Aeternitatis</i>	748

*

Exeunt V	766
----------	-----

PART SIX: QUIETUS 781

Recognition	785
Unity	793
Decession	806

*

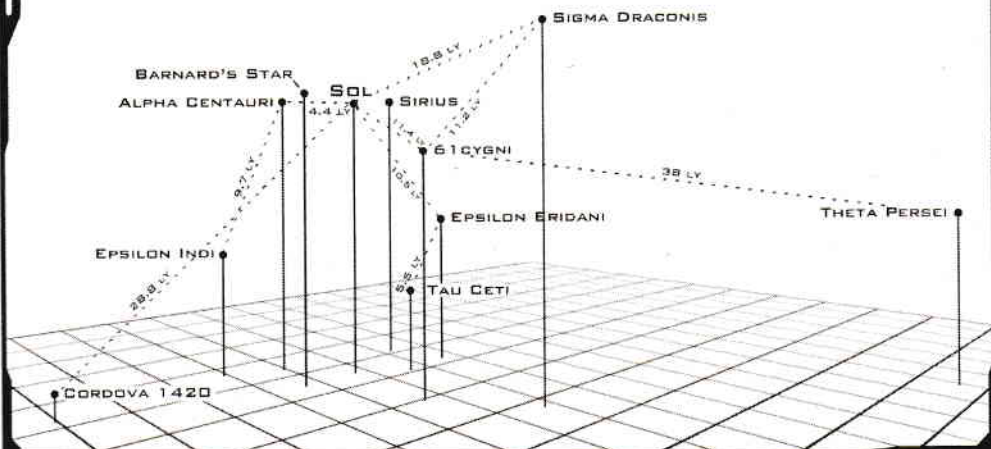
Exeunt VI	821
-----------	-----

ADDENDUM 827

Appendix I: Spacetime & FTL	829
Appendix II: Ship-Based Combat in Space	841
Appendix III: Terminology	844
Appendix IV: Timeline	869

*

AFTERWORD & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 873



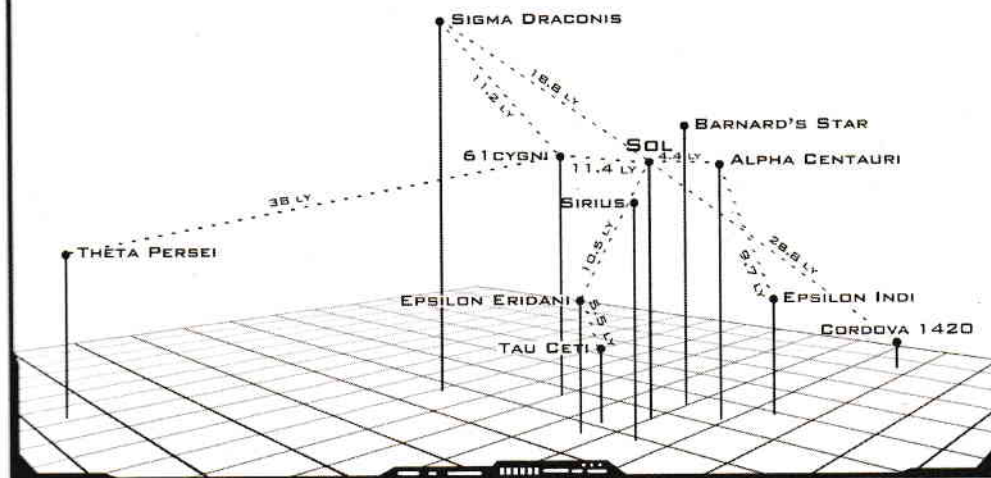
LEAGUE OF ALLIED WORLDS

- SOL
- ALPHA CENTAURI
 - STEWART'S WORLD
- EPSILON ERIDANI
 - EIDOLON
- EPSILON INDI
 - WEYLAND

- SIGMA DRACONIS
 - ADRASTEIA
- THETA PERSEI
 - TALOS VII
- 61 CYGNI
 - RUSLAN

NON-ALLIED

- CORDOVA 1420
- TAU CETI
 - SHIN-ZAR



LIBRIS

We know
books

PART ONE

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

EXOGENESIS

CHAPTER I

* * * * *

DREAMS

1.

The orange gas giant, Zeus, hung low above the horizon, huge and heavy and glowing with a ruddy half-light. Around it glittered a field of stars, bright against the black of space, while beneath the giant's lidless glare stretched a grey wasteland streaked with stone.

A small huddle of buildings stood in the otherwise desolate expanse. Domes and tunnels and windowed enclosures, a lone place of warmth and life amid the alien environment.

Inside the compound's cramped lab, Kira struggled to extract the gene sequencer from its alcove in the wall. The machine wasn't that large, but it was heavy, and she couldn't get a good grip on it.

"Dammit," she muttered, and readjusted her stance.

Most of their equipment would stay on Adrasteia, the Earth-sized moon they had spent the past four months surveying. Most of their equipment, but not all. The gene sequencer was part of a xenobiologist's basic kit, and where she went, it went. Besides, the colonists who would soon be arriving on the *Shakti-Uma-Sati* would have newer, better models, not the budget, travel-sized one the company had stuck her with.

Kira pulled again. Her fingers slipped, and she sucked in her breath as one of the metal edges sliced her palm. She let go and, upon examining her hand, saw a thin line of blood oozing through the skin.

Her lips curled in a snarl, and she hit the gene sequencer, hard. That didn't help. Keeping her injured hand knotted in a fist, she paced the lab, breathing heavily while she waited for the pain to subside.

Most days the machine's resistance wouldn't bother her. Most days. But today, dread and sadness outran reason. They would be leaving in the morning,

taking off to rejoin their transport, the *Fidanza*, which was already in orbit around Adra. A few days more, and she and everyone else in the ten-person survey team would get into cryo, and when they woke up at 61 Cygni, twenty-six days later, they would each go their separate ways, and that would be the last she would see of Alan for . . . for how long, she didn't know. Months, at least. If they were unlucky, over a year.

Kira closed her eyes, let her head fall back. She sighed, and the sigh turned into a groan. It didn't matter how many times she and Alan had done this dance; it wasn't getting any easier. The opposite in fact, and she hated it, really hated it.

They'd met the previous year on a large asteroid the Lapsang Trading Corp. was planning to mine. Alan had been there to conduct a geological survey. Four days—that was how long they'd spent together on the asteroid. It had been Alan's laugh and his mess of coppery hair that caught her attention, but it was his careful diligence that impressed Kira. He was good at what he did, and he didn't lose his calm in an emergency.

Kira had been alone for so long at that point, she'd been convinced she would never find someone. And yet seemingly by a miracle, Alan had entered her life, and just like that, there had been someone to care for. Someone who cared for her.

They'd continued to talk, sending long holo messages across the stars, and through a combination of luck and bureaucratic maneuvering, they'd managed to get posted together several more times.

It wasn't enough. For either of them.

Two weeks ago, they'd applied to corporate for permission to be assigned to the same missions as a couple, but there was no guarantee their request would be approved. The Lapsang Corp. was expanding in too many areas, with too many projects. Personnel were spread thin.

If their request was denied . . . the only way they'd be able to live together long term would be to change jobs, find ones that didn't require so much travel. Kira was willing—she'd even checked listings on the net the previous week—but she didn't feel as if she could ask Alan to give up his career with the company for her. Not yet.

In the meantime, all they could do was wait for the verdict from corporate. With how long it took for messages to get back to Alpha Centauri and the slowness of the HR Department, the soonest they could expect an answer was the end of next month. And by then, both she and Alan would have been shipped off in different directions.

It was frustrating. Kira's one consolation was Alan himself; he made it all worthwhile. She just wanted to *be* with him, without having to worry about the other nonsense.

She remembered the first time he'd wrapped his arms around her and how wonderful it felt, how warm and safe. And she thought of the letter he'd written her after their first meeting, of all the vulnerable, heartfelt things he'd said. No one had ever made such an effort with her before. . . . He'd always had time for her. Always shown her kindness in ways large and small, like the custom case he'd made for her chip-lab before her trip up to the Arctic.

The memories would have made Kira smile. But her hand still hurt; and she couldn't forget what the morning would bring.

"Come on, you bastard," she said, and strode over to the gene sequencer and yanked on it with all her strength.

With a screech of protest, it moved.

2.

That night, the team gathered in the mess hall to celebrate the end of the mission. Kira was in no mood for festivities, but tradition was tradition. Whether or not it went well, finishing an expedition was an occasion worth marking.

She'd put on a dress—green, with gold trim—and spent an hour fixing her hair into a pile of curls high on her head. It wasn't much, but she knew Alan would appreciate the effort. He always did.

She was right. The moment he saw her in the corridor outside her cabin, his face lit up, and he swept her into his arms. She buried her forehead into the front of his shirt and said, "You know, we don't *have* to go."

"I know," he said, "but we should put in an appearance." And he kissed her on the forehead.

She forced a smile. "Fine, you win."

"That's my girl." He smiled back and tucked a stray curl behind her left ear.

Kira did the same with one of his locks. It never ceased to amaze her how bright his hair was against his pale skin. Unlike the rest of them, Alan never seemed to tan, no matter how long he spent outside or under a spaceship's full-spectrum lights.

"Alright," she said in a low voice. "Let's do this."

The mess hall was full when they arrived. The other eight members of the

survey team were crammed in around the narrow tables, some of Yugo's beloved scamrock was blasting over the speakers, Marie-Élise was handing out cups filled with punch from the large plastic bowl on the counter, and Jenan was dancing as if he'd had a liter of rotgut. Maybe he had.

Kira tightened her arm around Alan's waist and did her best to put on a cheery expression. Now wasn't the time to dwell on depressing thoughts.

It wasn't . . . but she couldn't help it.

Seppo headed straight for them. The botanist had pulled back his hair into a topknot for the night's event, which only accentuated the angles of his thin-boned face. "Four hours," he said, coming close. The drink slopped out of his cup as he gestured. "Four hours! That's how long it took me to dig my crawler free."

"Sorry, Seppo," said Alan, sounding amused. "I told you, we couldn't get to you before then."

"Bah. I had *sand* in my skinsuit. Do you know how uncomfortable that was? I'm rubbed raw in half a dozen places. Look!" He pulled up the fringe of his ratty shirt to show a red line of skin across his belly where the lower seam of his skinsuit had chafed.

Kira said, "Tell you what, I'll buy you a drink on Vyyborg to make up for it. How about that?"

Seppo lifted a hand and pointed in her general direction. "That . . . would be acceptable compensation. But no more sand!"

"No more sand," she agreed.

"And you," said Seppo, swinging his finger toward Alan. "You . . . know."

As the botanist tottered off, Kira looked up at Alan. "What was that about?"

Alan chuckled. "No idea. But it's sure going to be strange not having him around."

"Yeah."

After a round of drinks and conversation, Kira retreated to the back of the room and leaned against a corner. As much as she didn't want to lose Alan—again—she also didn't want to say farewell to the rest of the team. The four months on Adra had forged them into a family. An odd, misshapen family, but one she cared for all the same. Leaving them would hurt, and the closer that moment came, the more Kira realized just how much it was going to hurt.

She took another long drink of the orange-flavored punch. She'd been through this before—Adra wasn't the first prospective colony the company had posted her to—and after seven years spent jetting around from one blasted

rock to another, Kira had begun to feel a serious need for . . . friends. Family. Companionship.

And now she was about to leave all that behind. *Again.*

Alan felt the same. She could see it in his eyes as he moved around the room, chatting with members of the team. She thought perhaps some of the others were also sad, but they papered over it with drink and dance and laughs that were too shrill to be entirely genuine.

She made a face and downed the rest of the punch. Time for a refill.

The scramrock was pounding louder than before. Something by Todash and the Boys, and their lead singer was howling, “—to fleeee. And there’s nothing at the door. Hey, there’s nothing at the door. Babe, what’s that knocking at the door?” and her voice was climbing to a wavering, saw-blade crescendo that sounded as if her vocal cords were about to snap.

Kira pushed herself away from the wall and was about to start for the punch bowl when she saw Mendoza, the expedition boss, clearing a path toward her. Easy for him; he was built like a barrel. She’d often wondered if he’d grown up on a high-g colony like Shin-Zar, but Mendoza denied it when she asked, claimed he was from a hab-ring somewhere around Alpha Centauri. She wasn’t entirely sure she believed him.

“Kira, need to talk with you,” he said, coming near.

“What?”

“We have a problem.”

She snorted. “There’s *always* a problem.”

Mendoza shrugged and mopped his forehead with a handkerchief he pulled from the back pocket of his pants. His forehead reflected bright spots from the strings of colored lights draped across the ceiling, and there were blotches under his arms. “Can’t say you’re wrong, but this needs fixing. One of the drones down south went dead. Looks like a storm took it out.”

“So? Send another one.”

“They’re too far away, and we don’t have time to print a replacement. Last thing the drone detected was some organic material along the coastline. Needs to be checked before we leave.”

“Oh come on. You really want me to head out *tomorrow*? I’ve already cataloged every microbe on Adra.” A trip like that would cost her the morning with Alan, and Kira was damned if she was going to give up any of their remaining time together.

Mendoza gave her a steady, *are you bullshitting me* look from under his