

Uranium Fist

Uranium Fist

by Mark Cantrell

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A Fist In Time

Preface To Uranium Fist1

EVERY book that was ever written is a product of its time.

They begin life as an idea in the author's mind: a seed that takes root, a quantum particle that detonates into a universe-creating Big Bang. They take on a life of their own, so that the author begins as the progenitor and ends as portal for something else that is extruding its existence into our world. From Mind, to paper through the medium of the author's nervous system and fingers, books are made flesh from our flesh but are rooted in the reality and influences of the times in which they are conceived and gestated.

That includes works of science fiction set in the future. It also includes books that are somehow ahead of their time.

Apparently, I did that with my first novel, Uranium Fist.

When I breathed life into the sheets of wood-pulp and ink, I was also creating something written for the day, but waiting fallow for the future resonance that would beat in time to its own inner tempo.

I never set out to do that.

In fact, I am still sceptical that I did this in the first place.

But frequently, it's not the author that determines such things; the readers do that when they bring themselves to the words and read between the lines and add their own interpretations to the author's vision.

For me, Uranium Fist was an adventure and an experiment. Up until that time, I had never written a work of novel proportions. I had no idea if I even possessed the stamina for such an involved project. So, the misgivings coupled with the desire to make the attempt, played their part in the selection of the project chosen to be my first book.

There were other influences, of course, that played their part in the idea that would become Uranium Fist. And they are essential ingredients to the story of how I allegedly penned something ahead of its time.

In the early 90s, I was a student studying political theory at Liverpool University. I had only been a writer for a couple of years when I opted to begin my first book. Politically idealistic, and attracted to the hard Left I wanted to write something that expressed my politics as well as my literary aspirations.

When the First Gulf War ended, I longed to write a story that expressed my opposition to that war, but I could not come up with something that quite fitted that scenario. Instead, I changed track and came up with a working class revolution on a distant Earth colony world. I chose to write the story as a correspondent's article about the defeat and destruction of that revolution. A kind of John Reed in space.²

(Unbeknown to me at the time, my correspondent's surname was Reid. If that was deliberate, then it was only unconsciously so. I didn't see it until some time later.)

The short story was an experiment and didn't work, but it was to this story that I returned when I wrote the novel. That was in 1992. I continued the experiment. The novel was to be a book written by the correspondent ten years on from the revolution's defeat, recounting her experiences and the experiences of those involved.

It followed a kind of journalistic format, that was again experimental³ for me. As the book progressed it became more focused on the correspondent, as she became drawn into the drama of which she was covering and came to relate to the people and their hopes and dreams.

Inevitably, the book was flabby and over-written. It was a first attempt after all, but it formed the draft that I revised some years later to develop the book as it is now.

In the days when I wrote the book, the Soviet Union had only just passed into the dustbin of history. The Anti-Capitalist movement that exploded onto the scene at Seattle in 1999 was still an unknown, unsuspected future development.

To me, it seemed that I had to write a novel in which the revolution was destroyed. In part this was a reflection of the time. Added to that was a notion I wished to express in the book: that the capitalist class is armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons. I was playing with the notion that threatened with a revolution, they would use these weapons as a desperate attempt to crush any revolutionary

uprising. Hence, the revolution on my colony world of Greyermede was nuked⁴.

Among my influences there was also my readings about the Bolshevik Revolution. That revolution was crushed (though not so intensely as my fictional one) and rotted into the bureaucratic state capitalist regime established under Stalin. That one that had so recently collapsed before I began my book.

I had also been influenced by reading the Iron Heel by Jack London, and this added a certain simplistic heroic adventurism to the tone of the novel. I never worried about the simplistic nature of the politics of the book. For one thing, I had never written novel, for another I was young and idealistic and there is nothing inherently wrong with that. The book set out to do what I wanted. Mostly.

Then I forgot about the book and moved on.

So did the world.

Until 1999.

No sooner had I done the re-write, than the international anti-capitalist movement burst into the open at Seattle. The twentieth century ended with an unprecedented revolt against global capitalism. Suddenly socialism was no longer 'dead'; but a vibrant part of an amalgam of opposition that was challenging all the precepts and pinnacles of a global economic system that was said to have been validated beyond all doubt by the collapse of 'communism' in the Soviet Union.

Suddenly radical social change was back on the agenda. And it followed through, across the globe, with a resurgence in radical politics not seen since the Sixties and in many ways never before seen. The world was rocking, if still a long way from revolution.

Well, the world is still a long way from the kind of revolution seen in my book (and of course it was fictional and will bear no relation to one in reality), but revolutions grow from such political and social soil as is being ploughed today.

So that brought the comment that Uranium Fist was ahead of its time. It might have focused on but one strand in the current anti-capitalist mood, but I hinted within that book at many more strands. It has reflected, in a simple and perhaps

naive form, the anti-capitalist movement that has emerged so dramatically.

Uranium Fist was and is an anti-capitalist novel.

In that sense, I guess it's true that it was ahead of its time, though I will forever remain sceptical myself.

That said, I trust that one part at least will never be ahead of its time nor contemporary, but remain a fantasy — and that is that nuclear weapons will never be used to suppress humanity's desire for social justice and freedom.

As they all too easily could be.

Here's to the future. Here's to being ahead of times. Here's to a better world.

If by some miracle, Uranium Fist can play a part, however small and trivial, then I shall be pleased. But I must emphasis it remains what it always was — a novel and (I hope) a damn good story.

Mark Cantrell,

Bradford, 11 September 2003

COMING SOON...

Presented By Writers of Worlds:

Two Novels By Mark Cantrell

CITIZEN ZERO

SINCE the early decades of the 21st Century, when society was scarred by the traumas of globalisation and a protracted war on terror, Britain has become a peaceful and prosperous consumer society.

Historians are already talking of a Golden Age, but under the security-driven authoritarian regime of Alexander Carlisle - Britain's longest serving PM - they know not to say anything else.

But this Golden Age masks a rotten core - and it is about to come crashing down.

On the fringes of society are the 'zeros' - the poor, the unemployed, the destitute - who paid the price for society's affluence. Lurking in their midst is Clute, one of Carlisle's former comrades-in-arms who helped him seize power. He has turned self-styled prophet of revolution, but behind his rhetoric of a better world is a nihilistic vision of apocalyptic proportions.

Clute is about to destroy the technological chains of social control by attacking its weakest point. In so doing, the zeros will be unleashed to rampage through the consumer citadels in an orgy of violent rage. So will begin a catastrophic struggle between society and those it exiled.

David Mills is about to become a central player in this world-shattering power struggle. He is a zero, ordered to take part in the JobNet global recruitment scheme. To begin with, it seems to fulfil all its promise as he finds a woman to love and prospects for a better life through this artificial world, then it all goes insane and he is struggling to save both his sanity and his life.

Unbeknown to him, he was used to carry a deadly virus into the heart of the global network's weakest link - JobNet. Now the virus is spreading, corrupting, destroying all the technology that kept the zeros down throughout the world.

While Mills is struggling to exist all over again, the real world is burning in civil war and he has become the focus of a desperate manhunt by Government forces. If they can find his 'kidnapped' body or his projection in AR, then they hope to destroy the virus at source. It is a desperate gambit in a desperate time.

Yet again, Mills is the victim of forces beyond his control or knowledge, but this time - if he survives - he can be a force for change. From being nothing, Mills has become everything; he can save the world. There's only one problem - he might have to destroy it first.

SILAS MORLOCK

TERAPOLIS is an urban sprawl of global proportions; its flesh and bone towers breach even the oceans' restless barriers and forever shield humanity from the light of day. The city has subsumed the great conurbations of history, absorbed whole nations, embalmed entire continents...

Here, in the neon-lit avenues and shaded alleys, the populace pursues the endless and morbid pursuit of fleshly pleasures: anything that drowns the spark of

Selfhood until it can be released into the mysterious and much-craved Gestalt-state.

The chimerical technology is the gift of Silas Morlock, the enigmatic and reclusive head of MorTek. Now, as Morlock contemplates the completion of his life's work, he is disturbed to learn of the return of an ancient scourge.

Hiding in the shadows of his city, an organisation known only as the Incunabula has resurrected an ancient and powerful drug. Slowly, its malign influence is spreading like a plague - and it is literally a poison to the Gestalt.

There is hope yet in the form of Adam, one of the dealer Caxton's prime contacts. He is a misfit and a dreamer, an unlikely saviour indeed, torn between the cravings for the Gestalt and his burning addiction to Caxton's merchandise.

So Adam is destined to become a pawn played by both sides in an ancient struggle, for Caxton is more than just a dealer; he knows the true nature of the Gestalt and he knows Morlock. The two share an old enmity that transcends even life and death.

The conflict will take Adam into the heart of darkness, where he is doomed to learn the secret of the Gestalt for himself. The discovery could cost him his Soul, but if he can overcome the horror then he might just save Humanity from itself...

In the shadows at the heart of darkness, Adam must find himself... or be worse than Damned. So begins the final battle for possession of the Human Soul.

Writers of Worlds is a new UK publisher preparing to launch in the near future. Both of the above novels are under preparation to be released on the launch list. For more information, visit Tyke Writer Export, the author's literary website at

www.tykewriter.supanet.com

And now, on with...

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URANIUM FIST

“In its struggle for power the proletariat has no other weapon but organisation.”

Lenin

“Bourgeois society faces a dilemma: either a return to socialism, or a return to barbarism.”

Rosa Luxemburg

“A spark, that is what our movement represents - a spark that will ignite a revolutionary fire throughout the galaxy...”

Karl Minsky

“This, then, is our answer... When you reach out your vaunted strong hands for our palaces and purpled ease, we will show you what strength is. In roar of shell and shrapnel and in whine of machine gun will our answer be couched. We will grind you revolutionists down under our heel and we shall walk upon your faces. The world is ours, we are its Lords, and ours it shall remain.”

The Iron Heel, Jack London, 1907

“The Gauntlet of Class War has been thrown down to us... We must take up this Gauntlet. We must meet our ancient class enemies head on and crush them utterly.”

Times Editorial, 2239

“What the bourgeoisie... produce, above all, is its own gravediggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.”

The Communist Manifesto, Karl Marx & Frederick Engels

Prologue

WHEN Edward Wilton stepped out of his front door, there was nothing to show that the day would be anything but ordinary.

It was a fine summer's day. The air tasted good, with the morning's first ejaculation of pollen. The wind brought with it the heavy tang of a summer storm, of moisture laden air, but the clouds were still brooding over the distant hills that overlooked the city.

Some might take that broiling mass of highly charged air as a bad sign. Not Edward. Ever since he could remember, he loved the exhilaration of a good thunderstorm. Even now, he could feel that energy building up inside his own body, crackling down his nerves to power up his own sense of excitement. And when the clouds unleashed their pent up rage, it brought a sense of euphoria, of revelry in the power of nature; storms were a heavenly symphony of the elements.

“Daddy! Daddy!”

Rebecca hurled herself towards him with the tempestuous enthusiasm that only a six-year-old can muster. She slammed into his knees with a force that almost knocked him to the ground, but he used that childish momentum to sweep his little girl into his arms and lift her high. She giggled and wriggled, and released the laughter from his own heart.

Sara followed at a more sedate pace from the cool interior of the house. She folded her arms, leaned against the doorframe and smiled. “Careful, darling! He’s not as young as he used to be.”

“Not as old, surely,” he said, adopting a mock frown.

She smiled with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes and mouthed her love for him. He pulled his daughter close and moved to put his free arm around Sara’s waist. She felt good as she moved closer, and the smell of her showered and perfumed body added nuance to the passionate air.

He kissed her with a lingering motion. “Love you!” Then he turned and pecked

his daughter on the cheek. “And you!” Rebecca giggled loudly and wriggled until she was in her mother’s arms.

Part of his mind whispered that he was too old for this kind of display. The warmth inside his heart said otherwise. Meeting Sara was the best thing that ever happened to him. Rebecca’s arrival completed the entirety of his newfound happiness.

Until he met Sara, he never realised there was a gap in his life, or that he was unhappy. As a young man, he had always felt awkward around women, never sure how to handle himself. Quite unlike the self-assured man he was in business and commercial circles

The result was he never found anyone, and eventually concluded he never would. Unlike his peers - who married, divorced and grew bitter - he threw himself into his career, and climbed the ranks. Then - unexpectedly - he met Sara. She was one of the young analysts. She worked for him in a distant kind of way, and he never knew of her existence until they met in a lift of all places, both going to their respective departments.

“Which floor?” she politely enquired, taking him for just another of the middle managers. When he told her, she became obviously nervous. How often had she accompanied senior management, let alone the vice president of the bank - as he was then - on their way to the upper echelons of power?

Something about her manner amused him and he found himself automatically trying to make her feel at ease. It proved difficult to prise conversation out of her; not that she wasn’t talking, quite the contrary. He recognised the interview-speak immediately, the well considered words, chosen to convey a striking image of the speaker, without saying anything that might be turned around and thrown back.

When they arrived at her floor, he held the lift for a while so he could continue the conversation. It was innocent enough, but he still had his position to consider. Offices were terrible rumour machines. He kept their conversation as business-like as possible, trying to convey the image of management taking a friendly - but platonic interest - in a new staff member. Yet, he knew there was something more. He was amazed to find himself assessing Sara at more than the professional level. What’s more, he felt her assessing him in the same way.

On impulse, he asked her to lunch. She turned him down, with what seemed like a trivial excuse. After the initial dismay, he found himself both amused and intrigued. Later, he found an invitation to lunch on his internal mail. For the look of it, he left the reply for a couple of days before accepting the proposal. Sara's voice was filled with a mixture of surprise and nervousness. Edward discovered an entirely new avenue in life - what's more he found himself enjoying it.

"We really must be going, Sir." Jenkins suddenly pulled him from the depths of fond memories, snapping smartly to attention. Edward sighed inwardly. Duty called. Irksome to be so reminded by the staff. He casually acknowledged his chauffeur and turned to kiss Sara goodbye. She murmured her appreciation, while her wandering hands promised him a warm welcome on his return.

Reluctantly, he broke off and strolled towards the car. Jenkins held the door for him. He took his usual glance back to his young family before sliding inside.

"Bye, bye, Daddy!"

"Bye, Darling. See you soon!"

He waved back until the smoked glass window obscured him from his family's view. He continued to watch them through the glass. Sara took hold of Rebecca's hand and took her back into the house to get ready for school. Rebecca hopped and skipped by her mother's side and Edward felt the smile warm his face.

The smooth interior of the limousine felt cool and refreshing. The faint scent of leather tantalised his nose, adding nuance to the summer flavours still lingering in the air from outside. He settled into the seat and flicked open his briefcase. Rebecca's latest painting from school greeted him with its childish hues and a six-year-old's strange perception of the human body. Lifting the picture, he held it up to the light and gently nodded his head. It would make a good addition to the gallery developing in his office.

Edward felt the car rock slightly with the chauffeur's weight and he sighed at the prospect of another day in the office. Perhaps he would phone home later, and arrange to meet Sara for an extended lunch. They could take in a gallery or two, or go to the theatre. Edward reached out to close his briefcase; his movement synchronised with the driver's motion to touch the ignition stud.

The very last thing Edward saw was the light rushing to engulf him as an

explosion smothered the two human occupants in a ball of fire. The pressure mingled the two men's remains over the neighbourhood. Only close forensic examination ensured the right remains ended up in the right graves.

Rebecca and Sara came running out of the house to find burning debris scattered on the lawn. The child stared at the dying embers of her father's life and asked where Daddy had gone. Sara couldn't answer, only scream as she took in the wreckage of her life.

Days later, they found the charred drawing lodged in the branches of a tree.

TO this day, nobody knows who planted the bomb that killed Edward Wilton. Another mystery is how the assassins managed to penetrate the security that was an ever present and largely invisible shield around him.

In the aftermath of the bombing, Martial Law was hurriedly declared. The police and the local militia brutally cracked down on all forms of opposition. A wave of fear gripped Greyermede, already depressed share values slumped even further, and the whole planet held its breath as it pondered what - or who - would be next.

Perpetrators needed to be found. That was the only certainty. Politics played its part, and an enemy was quickly found and accused. A hitherto little known political party shot to the front pages. For the first time, much of Middle Greyermede heard the name of the Greyermede Communist Party (GCP).

Assassinations were nothing new. There had been a spate of them in recent years. None of them had involved such high profile figures as Edward Wilton; the slaying of the President of the Central Bank sent shockwaves that would inevitably be felt throughout the colonies to reach the Mother World itself.

So it began, but just then, nobody knew what was about to engulf humanity.

WHAT erupted on Greyermede and further afield, is merely a chapter in the age-old human story. It began long ago on a distant world on the rim of the galaxy we call the Milky Way. Ten millennia of civil war took humanity to the stars; and to new worlds on which to enact this Trans-millennial drama.

Too long in the distant past for this book. We must start much later. The beginning could be said to have arrived before Edward's untimely demise;

emerging from the economic turbulence sweeping the advanced worlds and the political tremors that followed in its wake. Even that is far too early for our story to begin.

The end of Edward Wilton must be our beginning. His assassination was a point of change, a qualitative shift in the pattern of events that would touch everybody on this world - and many more beyond. The storm had broken, in an unexpected place, and it was the tempest of an age-old human dream leaping into flesh.

Tempest Rising

Chapter 1

THEY were waiting for me by the time I arrived. Rob Nidel looked up as I approached the table. David Carter was deep in conversation with Omar Nkruma and didn't notice me until I sat down and pulled the ashtray towards me. He smiled half-heartedly, and then turned back to his conversation.

Angela looked up from whatever private thoughts were occupying her mind. "Hello, Sue," she said quietly. There was little enthusiasm in her voice. I wondered if she was having second thoughts about the interview.

Nkruma played with his lighter and watched me with his unfathomable dark eyes. His were the most inexpressive features I have ever seen. Quite unlike Carter, dwarfed by Nkruma's bear-like frame, who had an animated - if gaunt - face when he got going. With David, a recorder was essential - no journalist's shorthand was ever designed to keep up with him in full flow.

Today he was not so expressive. His conversation with Nkruma was low and half-hearted. They all seemed reticent to talk. The atmosphere around the table was subdued as they all explored memories, some joyful, others they preferred to forget. Seeing me to talk about their experiences was difficult. I appreciated their pain, but I don't think I ever really told them how grateful I was that they agreed to see me.

Their presence in that quiet little cafe in Mars Central was a testimony to the inner strength that took them through a difficult period. That same strength enabled them to face the memories, and share them.

Some of them - David and Angela for instance - I knew from my time on Greycorridor. That helped them to take me into their confidence. Others I'd met while researching this book, but they extended the same trust as the others. To look at, they didn't seem like people who once shook the stars to their cores, or gripped by the throat a system that had wrought the iron chains of capitalism across interstellar distances. They look like ordinary people, because that's exactly what they are.

Ordinary people, however, that have seen - and sometimes participated in - terrible things. None of them were keen to talk about what they have seen and

done. In that, they share something in common with soldiers down the ages. A kind of modesty, perhaps, or a reluctance to dwell on things that the human mind was never truly built to comprehend.

I found plenty of boasters while researching this book. Or more accurately, they found me. They'd been there, done that, seen this. But there was nothing very convincing about their ebullience, and it quickly became apparent that these people were just living a dream, some fantasy to bolster their own inconsequential lives. Eventually, I could spot these time wasters before they even opened their mouths.

The people in the cafe were different. It took me months to gain their trust.

When it all started, I was another jobbing hack, earning my keep by writing about the strange and the unusual on the colonies. I was a planet-hopper, moving from one world to the next in search of a story. I worked for the liberal Martian Chronicle, a vaguely left-leaning publication that had a reputation for pissing off the rich and powerful. Like most reputations, it was overblown, but its pages had room for the radical. It made it a good home for my work, and I owe it a lot.

Not least, I owe it for sending me to Greyermede when the story really exploded and nobody could fail to hear about a world that was once an unheard of backwater outside of the trade papers.

I went as a reporter, excited by a great story - a career maker for sure - but no more. I left with much more. For one thing, I was no longer that distant hack, aloof and unconcerned about the lives I touched. The people and the events I went to witness as a passive bystander moved me more than anything else I ever witnessed. The drama drew me in, until I became one with the hopes and aspirations of the human race. No longer was I the wandering dilettante. I found a metaphorical home.

It's a hard lesson for a reporter to learn; that we touch and affect the lives that we record. To say we are not involved is a cop out. We are involved. Our capacity to shape perceptions is powerful, and we bear a terrible duty to dig out the truth. This is our self-proclaimed conviction, our honour and our prestige. We have made the truth our *raison d'être* - but how many of us really practice what we preach?

Truth is not a neutral force. Objectivity and a lack of bias mean dealing with the

truth, sifting out those trails and following them wherever they lead. Once we reach that goal, or as close to it as we can possibly get, as objective reporters we have a duty to report it, to share it, to spread the word. Truth takes sides. To stand aside as an 'objective' observer is to stand aside from the truth.

I knew all this, and yet I knew nothing. On Greyermede, I was taught this lesson anew. The message was rammed home, and it changed me forever. My life would never be the same again, just as those who struggled around me would also never be the same.

The people sat around this table helped me to find myself, even as they struggled to find themselves. Every one of them had risen together to transform their world, and in the process had changed themselves. Humanity unbound is a powerful force for change; together we can shake the heavens and make the worlds anew.

WHEN the heavens first rumbled, however, I was elsewhere. On Calisto, if memory serves me right, then Proxima. Greyermede was a place I had never heard of. When it exploded, the entire galaxy suddenly awoke to discover the importance of this relatively prosperous, but quiet little colony.

I missed the beginning. Carter, Nkruma, Nidel and the others were to take me back to that fateful beginning, and give a sense of what it was like to be there. Taking out my recorder, I set it down on the table. They all stared at it, as if the thing was a grenade that might go off at any moment. In a way it was; a bomb of ideas waiting to detonate in the collective human mind.

After an uncomfortable silence, they reluctantly began to talk.

Chapter 2

UNUSUALLY, Angela broke the silence first. “The morning after they declared Martial Law, Firsthaven was a hive of activity,” she said. “We’d expected the city to be quiet, but when we walked through Commerce Square during lunch, Colony House looked ready for a siege, and by the looks of the crowd gathered outside, that’s just what was going on.”

“What were they doing?” I asked.

“Not much, just standing around. It all looked so relaxed, though we couldn’t see a lot from across the square. Some of the crowd was chanting and waving placards, but most of the people there were just curious bystanders.”

ANGELA paused, as if having second thoughts, or just to take stock. She took a sip of water and then turned to face Nkruma. “Got any of those going spare?”

He looked at the cigarette packet in his hand, and then silently offered it to her. Once Angela took one of the cigarettes, he took one himself and both lit up. When Angela exhaled the smoke in satisfaction, she looked as though she’d needed a cigarette for some time.

“I’m supposed to be quitting,” she said, glancing at the glowing tip and shrugging. “But what the Hell?”

She took another long, thoughtful drag and continued with her tale. “The crowd turned out to be journalists. They were protesting against the media restrictions the Government imposed. There must have been about fifty of them altogether. We could see the guards better now. They were militiamen, and they seemed uneasy about the situation. I don’t think they knew what to do.

“‘Dutton’s attempt to control the media is a direct attempt to control public thought,’ one of the demonstrators yelled. ‘He’s trying to monopolise debate and stamp out the desire for independence. But let me tell you this - he won’t succeed!’”

“The crowd cheered.

“I have letters of support from the union Federation, and from the important opposition groups. They too are opposed to these media restrictions, and support us in our campaign. They’re all feeling the heel of Colonial tyranny, but they are fighting on and are working to form a multi-party committee to discuss the election of a -‘

“A riot cop appeared from nowhere and grabbed the man in a headlock. More black-clad cops swarmed through the crowd. Confusion erupted. Screams echoed from the buildings. Angry shouts. People were clubbed to the ground. It didn’t matter if they were demonstrators or passers by, the police smashed into them all. Others ran in panic.

“It didn’t take long to smash the demonstration. We joined the last of the stragglers in the run for safety.”

“TRAFALGAR was little better,” Nkruma said. “The militia was out on the streets. We treated them warily. Nobody was sure about their attitude towards independence, but I know that some people tried to draw them out them in conversation. It wasn’t something I could do; the police are bad enough, but soldiers really scare me.”

“What were you doing at the time?”

“Avoiding the police!” he laughed. “I’d been made redundant about three months before all this happened. I had time on my hands, and in the political climate I gravitated towards the Workers’ Democratic Front (WDF). After the announcement of Martial Law, I was scared and wanted to know what we should be doing, so I hurried to the WDF party offices. The new paper had just come out and we were going to try to sell as many as we could before the police stopped us.

“Before I got to our party office, I could already hear a commotion. Voices argued. People were screaming, I couldn’t tell if it was in fear or anger, but I was tempted to turn back and go home. I didn’t fancy being caught up some kind of police action.

“An unmarked van skidded round the corner and tumbled on its side. Sirens suddenly echoed through the urban canyons. I stood stunned, not knowing what to do. Moments later, the driver crawled out of the wrecked vehicle. He was covered in blood and swayed groggily. Then a patrol car skidded round a corner

and slammed into the concussion-drunk man. The car skidded to a halt, rolling the man underneath it like a broken doll.

“I was scared. They’d just killed a man. They must have seen me. I ducked into the cover of a factory doorway anyway, and cowered on the ground. I was shaking, my teeth were chattering, and the noise seemed terribly loud. Car doors banged. Glass crunched under booted feet, then I heard something thrown onto the road.

“Carefully, I peered round the wall. The ruined van was being ransacked. One of the officers threw bundles of newspapers onto the ground. The other stacked them in a pile before setting light to the lot.

“I watched - still shaking - from the cover of the doorway until the cops left, then I crept cautiously to the junction with the next street. The office was being ransacked, its display windows shattered. Amongst the shards of glass was a broken word-processor and the desk that the police must have thrown through the plate-glass. Then I saw Sara, one of my comrades, as she was dragged out of the building and thrown to the ground. She landed on the glass shards and was badly cut.

“‘Drop that or I’ll drop you!’ a cop barked at a man in an office worker’s cheap suit. He held a lump of broken paving stone and was about to throw it. Others followed his lead. More flagstones were ripped up to provide ammunition.

“‘I warned you!’ The cop pulled out a tazer and fired. The office worker dropped to the ground in spasm, silencing the enraged crowd. I didn’t know if they were going to disperse, or riot, but the atmosphere was intense.

“‘All of you, go home! This office has been closed by order of the Government’s emergency powers. If you don’t disperse you will be arrested.’

“More police came to the door and stared at the angry crowd. One of them began to speak into his radio, I knew that meant riot cops, but the rest of the crowd ignored it. One of the cops walked a few paces towards us. With one hand resting on a hip, legs apart, he pointed his baton at the crowd and angrily told them to disperse. The crowd ignored him. That pose of authority made no impression.

“‘Cops go home!’ someone cried, followed by the rest of the crowd as they took

up the chant. Someone threw a stone at the leader. He went down, the side of his face smeared with blood. Everything went crazy. Stones pelted the police. They tried to duck into the building for cover, but the crowd surged forward.

“A distant wailing made itself heard above the noise of the fighting. Two black vans clad in steel mesh slammed into the body of the riot. People fell through the air and writhed on the tarmac. Hordes of black-uniformed, amour-clad cops rushed out of the vans and without a word they charged at us. I was caught in the middle of a pitch-battle as the police hammered anyone in their way. With club and shield they smashed people to the ground. People were dragged away, bruised and bleeding, to be thrown into the waiting vans.

“But the crowd fought back. It was getting too dangerous there. Hastily I pushed my way through the struggling figures and tried to get clear of the fighting. A riot cop appeared in front of me. He grinned like a madman, the gleam of joy in his eyes truly frightening. With a blow from his riot shield he knocked me to the ground and I felt a hefty kick. I curled into a ball to protect myself from the expected beating, but nothing more came. The tables had turned and the cop was no longer smiling. I crawled away quickly, frightened that I would be trampled in the confusion.

“After some effort I managed to push my way through to the pavement, where I leaned heavily against a wall. Once I got my breath back I started to make my way down the street, desperately trying to avoid the attentions of any more cops. An old man appeared for a moment in a gap in the crowds, he looked terrified - a passer-by that stopped to watch the commotion and then found himself caught up as things turned ugly. I looked on in outrage as a cop appeared and punched him savagely in the face. Down he fell, and the cop kicked him in the stomach. I rushed over to the old man as fast as I could. He was babbling where he lay, ‘I’m not involved...’ he said, ‘I’m an old man. I’m not involved.’

“I tried to pick him up and help him away but a gloved hand grabbed the collar of my jacket and I was roughly dragged to my feet. Another cop rushed over and grabbed me in a headlock before I could do anything. Screaming abuse, the cops dragged me towards a waiting van and roughly manhandled me into the back. The last thing I saw before they slammed the door was a group of young militiamen. They were frightened youths, called up for routine compulsory service. They didn’t know what to make of the situation.

“As for the old man, he was left to bleed on the street!”

Chapter 3

OVER the next few days, these ugly scenes were repeated all over Greyermede as the police ransacked party offices and shut down opposition newspapers. Not all these actions produced riots. For the most part crowds gathered round to abuse the police. Otherwise, the police were little hindered.

What was striking about the riots that did occur was their cross-class nature. All social groups were united together to resist the government clampdown.

Whatever their differences, working class and middle class, small businessman, and Greyermede capitalist, all united against a common foe: Terran capital, the Colonial regime, and its machinery of oppression.

Revolutions often begin with such a honeymoon period. When all classes are united against their immediate enemy. During such a period, the class struggle is focused on the governmental machinery of the old order. Not until this has been dealt with does the class struggle boil over between the different factions.

Greyermede had not yet reached this phase. The working class and the middle class organisations began to come together in alliance against the Government, temporarily forgetting their differences.

The working class did not trust their middle class allies, while the latter hoped to nullify what they considered the excesses of working class aims, and bring them into line behind an independent capitalist programme. But for now the different class interests were submerged beneath the need to deal with an oppressive Terran-backed state.

The developing Opposition Coalition lost little time in taking to the streets to demonstrate against martial law, while strike activity escalated across the planet. Yet, there were no clashes with the militia. These armed troops assumed a more prominent position, but they did little more than assist the police in their mundane duties.

The riot cops and the CIS5 conducted most of the counter-insurgency operations. The militia was an unknown quantity. What were its views - would it remain loyal to the government? Would it open fire on the people? These were the sort of questions being discussed.

“BY May, the Government was as isolated as ever,” Carter said. “They’d increased the guards outside Colony House and strengthened the fortifications. Machine guns covered the approaches to the building and Terran troops could be seen mingling with the militia.

“Behind those fortifications it seemed they continued in the belief that they were the sole authority on the planet, but whatever was going on in there the people regarded as irrelevant. Preparations were still being made for the election of a Colonial Assembly, in secret since political activity was now illegal.

“Otherwise life went on as normal. People went to work, the transport systems were running, shops and cafes still did trade. Art galleries, cinemas, theatres still opened their doors to the paying public. Politically things seemed quiet. Until a few days later, when the demonstrations began.”

“THOUSANDS of people gathered at Trafalgar Central Station for the demonstration,” Nidel said. “Some of the Coalition leaders were caught in a dawn raid and arrested the week before. They were being held somewhere in the city, but the police hadn’t disclosed the position. The other Opposition leaders still at liberty organised the protest to demand their release.

“New Station Road was crowded with people. Banners and placards were stacked everywhere, waiting to be handed out. The air was filled with the babble of excited voices, discussing politics, the wave of arrests, and the prospects for the march.

“Maxwell Steadman had been arrested. It was widely rumoured that the leaders of the Opposition Coalition had tipped him as the first President of a free Greyermede. He was one of the founder members of the Independence Party. As one of Greyermede’s few industrialists able to compete with Terran capital, his wealth helped get the party off the ground. Arresting him was pure provocation.

“Someone started handing out the placards; the preparations well under way. It was a confusing time. People were wandering back and forth, giving out hurried instructions, unfurling banners and so on. People were shuffling into place, forming ragged lines under the guidance of the official stewards, marked by yellow vests for identification.

“‘What do you reckon the cops’ll do?’” someone asked me nervously.

“I don’t know. Don’t worry, we’ll be okay.’

“‘But I’ve never been arrested before.’

“‘You won’t be arrested, trust me!’

“AFTER about fifteen minutes the march organisers finally had everything ready. We slowly headed off down the road, gathering speed towards the city centre. Waving placards branded with slogans such as ‘Prisoners Out Now’ and ‘Dutton Go Home’, we walked down New Station Road. Traffic was halted and diverted along the route of the march by other stewards and volunteers; and people stopped to watch as the march went by. There were about five thousand people there that day. It was quite an event.

“We passed into the business district, just outside the city centre. For some reason the march came to a halt, but we still stood there chanting and shouting. I looked around, trying to see through the ranks of people. On my left, I saw a few riot cops standing idly by. One casually tapped his baton against his leg, his helmet visor raised to reveal an impassive face.

” ‘Oh shit!’ someone said behind me. I had to agree. Things didn’t look good. Handing my placard to someone beside me, I pushed my way through the crowd in an attempt to get nearer the front. Suddenly I found I couldn’t move anymore. The crowd had compressed together, then it surged backwards. I was knocked to the ground as people fled screaming and dropping placards everywhere.

“I was nearly trampled under that stampede, but someone kept their head. They hastily dragged me to my feet and pulled me along for a few metres before we became separated.

“The screaming grew louder as people struggled to get away. Riot police appeared in droves, clubbing the people to the ground and kicking them where they lay. A riot cop barged past me to club a young woman to the ground. She was dragged off by her hair, screaming and swearing at the cop. I turned around in dismay as more police appeared, and just missed being clubbed to the ground myself.

“There seemed to be a whole army of them. They were dressed in their black riot-armour, their faces hidden by long tinted visors. They didn’t have shields, only batons and riot guns. I ran as fast as I could as more vans came skidding to

a halt.

“A familiar face appeared through the crowds about ten metres away. I ran towards him waving madly. Then I saw him go down. Holding his face as though he had been clubbed. Yet there had been nobody near him. I covered the distance in seconds and knelt down to help him. The man’s face was dripping in blood, and was badly bruised. It was then I knew the bastards were using plastic bullets. Two more people came up to help, and we half-carried, half dragged my friend away to safety.”

DEMONSTRATION after demonstration fell this way. Smashed apart by well-organised, well equipped armies of riot police. Thousands were arrested wherever they tried to organise. The city streets belonged to the State. Whenever, wherever, the Opposition Coalition attempted to demonstrate they found the police waiting for them.

The situation seemed in hand. The middle class opposition was wavering in the face of this strong state machinery. Thousands of their best members languished in Dutton’s prisons, hundreds of thousands more were becoming too frightened to resist. Days passed, and Dutton and his Government began to breathe more easily.

Until the workers came out on strike.

The Trade Union Federation had completed negotiations with the faltering Opposition Coalition. A wave of strikes shook the planet, like nothing seen so far. Factories closed down. Communications workers, transport and many others came out in protest. The cities were crippled. Nothing functioned.

Police resources became stretched to breaking point. The Government managed to keep essential functions running by stationing militia and police personnel in charge of their operations. In so doing, Dutton drastically weakened his counter-insurgency forces out in the field.

Heartened by this turn of events, the Opposition Coalition organised more demonstrations and marches. Even more boldly they organised mass pickets and rallies outside Colony House itself. There were still clashes with the security forces, and some marches were dispersed, but the police had lost control. Too much unrest had broken out. The People controlled the streets.

In this heated situation, the demonstrators came to clash more often with the militia. This was a more serious turn of events. This was a body of men and women armed with automatic weapons and other serious military hardware. The middle class leaders could not slow events down. The working class pushed them, not to mention their own rank and file. But they needn't worry. In clash after clash, ordinary people disarmed the militia threat; arguing with them, and appealing to them not to fire on their fellow citizens. In case after case, the militia was defused, and brought, if not onto the side of the people, at least into neutrality; to the outrage of its Terran officer corps.

Days turned into weeks, then months. Strikes, demonstrations and clashes with the police increased. The working class organisations expanded their scope; from strike committees grew embryonic workers' councils, which soon began to take control of factories and administer their operations. Greyermede was gripped in a power vacuum, waiting for one side or the other to fill the void of authority.

Everyone felt Dutton and his Terran bosses would be forced to yield to so much popular pressure.

BLACK OCTOBER AND BEYOND

Chapter 4

THE power vacuum continued until October. In terms of anti-Government action, the working class was tied to the Opposition Coalition by the trade unions. Underneath this alliance, however, the working class moved steadily in its own direction. This drift towards independent action worried both the Coalition and the leadership of the colony's trade union movement, but there was little they could do about it.

The Greyermede Communist Party (GCP) was increasing its support within the working class by its words and by its deeds. They fought alongside the workers in their struggles against austerity measures. In that way, the party gained the kind of respect that the mainstream parties only dreamed of.

In city after city, factory after factory, the workers voted a resounding yes to the GCP, and millions surged to join the party. The Opposition leaders were horrified, but they hoped the workers could be persuaded to see sense once the planet was theirs. For the moment, they needed the strength of the workers to carry their own revolution forward. While the GCP fast became a sizeable majority amongst the industrial and rural workers, the Coalition was still confident in the millions of office workers that gave support, and in the many professionals and businessmen that threw their weight behind the Coalition. The Trade Union Federation also retained a lot of influence over its members. It was hoped that these factors would be enough to dampen any further revolutionary fervour.

In the meantime, the Coalition wasted no opportunity to denigrate the GCP and the other working class revolutionary parties. The honeymoon period was fast breaking down; the class struggle was reaching a head, before even the Old Regime had toppled.

The power vacuum continued nonetheless. The Coalition was unprepared to confront the Government in a direct bid for power. It preferred to bide its time until the election of the Colonial Assembly.

The working class wasn't ready to seize power. Workers' councils had arisen across the planet, but they were still little more than strike committees. Relatively few had taken the step towards running their own enterprises. Yet, the

workers were moving forward at a rapid pace. They needed to. Under such intense strike activity, the workers had to take things under their own guidance. Otherwise, Dutton would have starved them out. The webs of proletarian power were fast being spun.

MEANWHILE, Dutton released a great deal of political prisoners. The pressure of popular revolt forced his hand. In order to appease the angry populace and buy himself some time, he released thousands from the overcrowded prisons. To the delight of the Opposition Coalition, Maxwell Steadman also gained his freedom.

He was a hero of the Revolution. His face appeared on the front pages of every opposition paper there was. Even Dutton's media carried interviews with him. The image of a future interplanetary statesman was carefully managed, and Steadman's rise to Presidency was assured.

Chapter 5

THE police learned a great deal of information from the unfortunates that fell into the hands of their interrogators. A massive sweep was planned to arrest those whose names and addresses were revealed by the torture victims. These people were saved by Dutton's proclamation that released the prisoners before the police could act.

Despite being thwarted by the turn of events, they learned valuable intelligence from their captives, and from CIS agents embedded in the population itself.

Meanwhile the police and the militia still clashed with strikers. Time after time they tried to break the strikes by physical force. Sometimes they succeeded, mostly they failed.

Events were building to a head. The power vacuum couldn't last much longer with the working class building up its strength. The turning point of the Revolution was coming, and I had only just stepped off the shuttle at Copernicus Spaceport, completely unaware of what was unfolding a hundred miles away in Trafalgar...

"A small group of us gathered in Peterloo Square on the morning of the 9th," Nidel said. "There wasn't a soul about, which was good, because what we were doing was illegal. I was part of a group of volunteers preparing the square for the rally later that day. It was planned to be the biggest yet - about half a million people were expected.

"The square echoed with the sound of our hammers as we prepared the platform from where the speakers would address the crowd. We'd placed it in front of the Opera House steps, so that it commanded a view of the whole square. When the platform was ready, we began to decorate it with banners and flags. The new flag of Greyermede had just been hung from the front of the opera house; it was blue, emblazoned with the continents of the planet in mimicry of the Terran flag. We finished off by setting up the PA system. That was something I didn't know how to do, so I was standing by with a couple of my friends from university, supposedly keeping a look out. Instead, we just talked.

"'Who're you going to vote for,' I was asked.

“I dunno, Paul, what about you?”

“It doesn’t really matter, the Reds will probably get the majority!”

“I doubt it,’ my other friend said. ‘Anyway, I’ve heard the Coalition isn’t going to let extreme parties stand candidates, isn’t that right, Rob?’

“So I’ve heard,’ I replied. I didn’t really know, or care at that time.

“I’ll bet the Reds don’t like that!”

“They don’t, but who cares? They don’t represent any legal voice of the workers - the only authoritative voice there are the unions, and they’re behind the Coalition one hundred per cent! Once there’s a democratic government, then just let them try their insurrectionary antics!’ Michael added.”

“There was nothing I could say to that. I just nodded my head and wondered if anything could ever be that easy.”

“I was one of the GCP stewards at Central Station,” Carter said, taking up the tale. “The rail-workers had already taken control of the network. They were running the trains themselves. Thousands of people were gathered outside the station. Trainloads more were being shipped in from as far away as three hundred miles, just for this march. With so many people gathering in one place, you can imagine the confusion. It was important to prevent the platforms being clogged up with people, so I and several comrades were instructed to move the new arrivals outside.

“There, the crowds were getting themselves into ragged lines; arranged according to party, city, or regional organisation. The ranks stretched on for about half a mile. Yellow vested stewards mingled; sorting out the lines, giving hurried instructions, or chatting with comrades from their own organisations. Some of the stewards were shouting instructions to the assembled ranks through megaphones, producing a weird echo-like effect, as the instructions were repeated further down the line. The combined noise of thousands of chattering voices, and the harsh, amplified speech of the megaphones was almost deafening.

“I walked back into the station, passing groups of people excitedly discussing politics. Beyond them were some members of the Independence Party; middle

class socialites dressed in expensive clothes, we greeted each other with sour looks. They didn't want the GCP present, but we had turned up as party cadres, rather than union branches, and they weren't prepared to turn us away.

"I went to my assigned post on Platform Three. 'The Teliote train's coming!' someone shouted. I looked down the track, I could just see the train beginning to slow. As it pulled into the station, the driver waved a greeting. It came to a halt smoothly and a horde of people flooded out: workers, students, well-dressed professionals, and office workers in their typically bland uniform of grey suit and white shirt. From some of the carriages people were hastily passing out bundles of placards and folded up banners. Chaos it seemed, but within that chaos there was order as people proceeded to carry out previously allotted tasks as quickly as they could.

"'Make your way outside please!' I shouted above the noise of the crowd. People began to move towards the exits. There was none of the grumbling and pushing you would have got before. The atmosphere was joyful and optimistic. Everybody was excited.

"The job in the station was finished, so I followed the crowd outside and watched the confused mingling of the newcomers as they assembled. The important Coalition groups were at the front - those of the 'respectable' middle class in other words. The union branches followed behind them. Bringing up the rear were all the members of the revolutionary parties that were taking part. The organisers wanted us to know precisely what they thought of us. At the same time, they wanted to make sure that onlookers saw their organisations in the prominent positions. We weren't bothered. We knew we'd out-shout them anyway.

"I could see Maxwell Steadman loitering around the entrance to the station with a few of his cronies; Don Bentham of the Liberal Party, Stephen Northcote deputy of the Independence Party and a few others I didn't recognise. They were going to lead the march, these heroes of the Revolution, while the 'proles' brought up the rear.

"It took about fifteen minutes to get the new arrivals into place, and another fifteen minutes for stewards with megaphones to run down the final outline of the day's events. Then the march slowly got underway.

“The marchers walked at a steady pace down New Station Road. Crowds of shoppers stopped to watch as we went past, and the office windows were filled with cheering people. The atmosphere was electric. We Chanted and shouted and sing songs of defiance; the confidence of those there that day was insurmountable.

“As we turned onto High Gate Street we began to see the riot cops. Vans were parked here and there, the drivers peering out with undisguised hatred. The pavements were lined with cops watching, shouting abuse, but otherwise doing little. There were hundreds of thousands of us. Too many for them. We weren’t afraid and we made sure they knew by singing and chanting with greater ferocity.

“It was an amazing feeling to be walking amongst those same cops that so viciously smashed previous marches. As a steward, I was walking on the edge, closest to the cops. I could feel their hot gaze on my back as I walked by. Several times, I almost started laughing, but I thought better of it.

“The march was headed by a huge banner made from the new Greyermede flag, it billowed in the breeze like a sail pulling the People behind it. Emblazoned on the banner in gold letters on a red background was the slogan, ‘Smash the face of Tyranny: Independence, Freedom, Democracy, NOW’.

Before the march began, representatives issued an historic broadcast to the planet. It was Greyermede’s Declaration of Independence, issued from a hidden ‘pirate’ transmitter, but a direct call for Earth’s puppet regime to dissolve itself.

“Steadily the march progressed on its course without hindrance. At last, we were approaching Peterloo Square, only to be met by lines of armed militia troops. They stared at us nervously. They were in full battle gear and toyed uncertainly with automatic weapons. From a troop carrier, the vehicle’s commander gazed in wonder at the sea of people that halted before the militia lines.

“A militia Colonel with a strong Terran accent strode from behind the lines and stopped a metre from the first rank of our march. Brent, the city’s Chief of Police stood by his side, in his dress uniform. The marchers eyed them warily, but from the mutterings around me, I knew they weren’t going to back down.

“‘This is an illegal march!’ the Colonel bellowed in his best parade-ground voice. ‘You people shall disperse by order of the civil and military authorities.

We cannot tolerate anarchy and lawlessness in the streets! I have orders to use force if you fail to comply.’ Only angry murmurs answered his demand.

“I’m saddened to see a respectable man like yourself amongst this rabble, Sir,’ Commissioner Brent said to Steadman. He merely smiled, and then turned to face the crowd.

“The heel of Terran tyranny wants us to disperse!’ he cried. ‘What say you? Shall we disperse like frightened rabbits, or shall we walk on into the future of a free and prosperous Greyermede?’

“The crowd gave out a great roar, as thousands of voices answered Steadman: ‘GO ON!’

“Steadman turned to face the militia, ‘You’ve heard our answer. In the pursuit of the higher ideals of freedom and democracy, we are prepared to die!’

“Then Steadman turned his attentions to the lines of the militia. ‘Fellow citizens of Greyermede!’ he bellowed. ‘Why do you follow the enemies of Freedom? Put down your weapons, you have no reason to shoot and kill your brothers and sisters. Such an act would only re-forge the chains that have linked us to the despot of the colonised galaxy!’

“People began to approach the troops and engage them in argument. The militia looked uncertain as their officers barked orders at them and told them to arrest the people that entered their ranks, but they ignored them, and some listened intently to the arguments.

“Comrades!’ A young woman cried, climbing onto the bonnet of the police chief’s car. ‘You must choose whose side you are on. Are you the slaves of Earth, stained with the blood of innocents who believe only in democracy and freedom? Or are you citizens of Greyermede, armed and trained to defend us, your people, from aggression and tyranny? If you are slaves then you must fire on us. If not then you must join us. Put down your weapons. Do not commit the murder of so many unarmed and defenceless people! Support us!’

“The officer in charge didn’t like the turn of events. He dragged the woman from the car and threw her to the ground. ‘Don’t listen to these agitators! They would turn you away from your legal government and lead you into mutiny if you listened. Earth is the friend of Greyermede and always has been. I order you to

disperse these subversives -‘

“The march began to move once more, closing on the lines of the militia. As we drew closer, Steadman and his cronies began to sing the Internationale - the ancient song of the revolutionary. It filled my heart with loathing to hear the likes of Steadman sing that song, but the crowds took up the words, and thus singing we passed through the militia:

Arise ye starvelings from your slumbers

Arise ye prisoners of want

For reason in revolt now thunders

And at last ends the age of cant

Now away with all your superstitions

Servile masses arise! arise!

We’ll change forthwith the old conditions

And spurn the dust to win the prize

Then comrades come rally

And the last fight let us face

The Internationale

Unites the human race

“The harsh voice of the commander was drowned out in the tumultuous voice of the masses. The militia troops looked on, a few raised their weapons but then let them fall once more. They lacked the heart to fire on their own people. The whole ethos of the militia was based on defending the citizens of Greyermede, and in the crunch, they could not open fire. The forces of Dutton’s state machine looked on, either helpless or in silent sympathy as we marched triumphantly through them to swarm into Peterloo Square. “

Chapter 6

“BANNERS and flags flapped madly in the wind as though they would be torn away from the platform. A forest of placards swung in the air above the heads of half a million people as the Coalition leaders mounted the platform.

“The combined noise of thousands of people shouting and chanting was ear shattering. I felt sure that collective voice was shaking the Colonial regime to its very foundations.

“The crowd looked on expectantly as Don Bentham mounted the rostrum. Waving his arms in the air in a call for silence, he leaned towards the microphone and spoke a few words, which were lost in a whine of feedback. Bentham grimaced and stood back from the microphone until the noise subsided.

“‘I want to thank you all for coming today!’ he said at last. ‘You have sent a message to the colonised galaxy saying Greyermede is no longer an enslaved world. Today we have taken our place in the community of free worlds!’ The crowd greeted the statement with a loud burst of cheers.

“When the cheering subsided, Bentham spoke again, ‘Behind me are seated the leaders of the opposition groups that have fought Terran tyranny and brought us to the brink of a new democratic age. They will be talking to you here today, on this great occasion; the birth of a new era. As of today, Dutton is merely the leader of a provisional government. Empowered by us, the representatives of the people, to administer our world until the formation of a new government after the elections in November.’ He paused for breath, and produced a slip of paper from the pocket of his designer suit.

“‘This fax was today delivered to Governor Dutton informing him of the situation. It does not list demands, it lists our orders: the orders of a People united towards the goal of freedom!’ More cheers interrupted Bentham. ‘But we’re not fools. We knew Dutton would try to stop us in our march to democracy. On our way here you saw that, and this very day we showed Dutton that the coercive arms of Terran tyranny no longer work. The militia is with us, in spirit if not in body!’

“‘Dutton has been shown the hopelessness of his position, he has no choice but

to comply. The future waits with baited breath, which way shall you vote? The future government of our world is in your hands!’ Bentham left the stand to applause and many cheers, Steadman approached now, smiling benevolently for the benefit of the media.

“‘Citizens of free Greyermede!’ he began, bellowing in his loud, deep voice. ‘In a month, we go to the polling booths, for the first time in the hundred-year history of our world. It is a great day for Greyermede. Indeed, it is a great day for this galaxy, when an oppressed world throws off its shackles and reaches out for democracy.’

“‘As to your voting choice, I hope you will vote for my colleagues and I in the Independence Party... but let us not forget the other parties in our Coalition. We are all committed to the new Greyermede. Not a world in which a few dictate to the many, but a world in which we all co-operate to build a better world.’

“A great cheer cut Steadman off, and placards waved triumphantly in the air. At the back of the square, someone unfurled a huge banner proclaiming ‘Steadman for President!’. The Coalition had turned the affair into a pre-election rally.”

NIDEL continued: “Of course it was being used for electoral reasons, the election was only a month away. It’s what we’d campaigned for all that time. What so many people had suffered and fought for - a democratic world.”

“Yeah, a democracy that lives by selling out the masses!” Carter interrupted bitterly. “Democracy on the terms of domestic capitalism!”

Ignoring the interruption, Nidel went on, “The atmosphere was ecstatic. It felt like a celebration. At the front of the rally, people began to chant. ‘Steadman for President,’ they cried loudly, repeatedly. The chant caught on and spread like wildfire through the crowd. Steadman just stood there, arms held high, beaming at the crowds, lapping up the attention. This was his hour, his popularity was undeniable.

“I stood there chanting and shouting, I was completely caught up in the mood of the crowd. Suddenly I noticed that the people on the platform seemed agitated, hurriedly they were leaving their seats. Someone dragged Steadman away from the rostrum, another shouted into the PA, ‘SOLDIERS! The soldiers are coming!’”

“Confusion spread through the crowds. Hadn’t the militia refused to act? Then the first shots sounded above the noise of the crowd. Sharp reports, echoed rudely through the square.

“People around me began to panic. Near the centre we couldn’t see a thing, but we could hear the gunshots and the screams. The crowd began to separate as groups of panic-stricken people ran this way and that. The frightened screams were as intense as the exuberant cheering that went before. A stampede began as thousands of people tried to flee the square by streets that were now so many bottlenecks.

“I pushed my way towards the platform. It seemed a good place to get my bearings. The platform was empty, seats scattered, flags and banners torn and disarrayed. I caught sight of Steadman and some of his cronies scurrying into the Opera House, escorted by two armed policemen. I thought they’d been arrested but I later found the police escorted him to safety.

“The platform commanded a good view of the square. I saw our assailants for the first time. They weren’t militia, but Terran troops. They’d entered the square from the Bank Street access. I could see their vehicles parked askew on the road, troop carriers bearing the Terran flag. The soldiers themselves swarmed in squads of four or five across the square. Ahead of them, the square was littered with bloodstained bodies, and more were falling before that indiscriminate hail.

“I suddenly realised I had a better chance of survival in numbers. Out there I was increasingly standing out as a target. Fear squeezing my heart, I raced madly for the opera house doors, hoping to follow Steadman’s route, but the doors were locked.

“‘Bastards!’

“A fresh rattle of gunfire. More of these armour-clad combat troops stormed the square from the South side. Suddenly I was surrounded by kicking, pushing and screaming people as they fought to escape these fresh killers. A man stumbled in front of me, but I couldn’t stop, I was being carried by the flow. He was trampled underfoot.

“The people around me slowly dispersed as they fled for the Oak Tree Lane exit. I found myself in the open once more. I didn’t like that feeling of exposure and I hastily ran towards High Gate Road, braving the gunfire, since it was the least

crowded exit.

“I wasn’t completely alone as I ran the gauntlet of gunmen. A group of about ten or twenty people followed behind me, and began to overtake. I saw one man’s chest explode and something wet splashed my face. He went down, a gaping hole where his heart should have been, a few shattered ribs glistened wetly. I ran all the harder, keeping low. The exit was up ahead, just ten metres away. Someone else was shot behind me. The victim was cannoned into me by the force of the bullet’s impact and I fell to the ground under the body.

“In near hysteria I untangled myself from the corpse. It was Paul, one of my friends who helped prepare the speaker’s platform. The back of his head was gone. I didn’t want to leave him there like that, but I had no choice. The tears streamed down my face and I couldn’t see, but I cleared the final ten metres and ran down High Gate Road.

“I was free of that killing ground at last. Free that is until several armed men stepped into view...”

“THE chatter of those Terran guns cut across the sounds of the chanting,” Carter said. “I was near the edge and amongst the first to see them. We ran quickly, or at least as quickly as we could when so many others were in our way. We left a lot of good comrades behind that day.

“The Terran troops were swarming in from Bank Street. The rest of the crowd prevented us from running the opposite way. In terror we ran towards the South side of the square, hoping to escape down that road. By the time we got there, more Terran troops arrived. I saw at least ten people ahead of me go down, cut to pieces by the Terran bullets. There must have been hundreds of others who veered away from the troops. Many went back north and west, but I found myself in a group that was trapped against the entrance to a high-class department store. It had a columned, neo-futurist facade that offered us some cover from the Terrans as they stormed by, but the people behind us were less fortunate. The troops cut them down where they ran, or where they cowered.

“One girl was wailing and pulling at the corpse of a young man, maybe the girl’s boyfriend or brother. A gun roared and small explosions of blood erupted across her back. Crying out, she arched in agony before slumping across her companion’s corpse. She couldn’t have been more than seventeen. Another

group of people was cornered by the troops. They fell to their knees and pleaded for their lives, but the soldiers shot them one by one, leaving the bodies in a pathetic heap. While this was happening more people fled to our hiding place, and with them they brought the killers.

“Three soldiers opened fire on our position. The bullets bounced dangerously off the concrete facade. A man next to me crumpled to the ground with a gaping hole in his forehead.

“One of the soldiers turned his gun on a crowd of fleeing people nearby. The gun chattered eagerly, dealing out death until the magazine clicked empty. Desperately, the soldier struggled with a fresh magazine, but before he could complete the reload, the fear of these people turned to hatred. The soldier found himself surrounded by angry men and women who dragged him to the ground where he was beaten. His gun appeared waving in the air a moment, then it disappeared. A shot sounded a moment later and the crowd dispersed, leaving the soldier sprawled in a pool of blood.

“Another burst cut through the air and suddenly we found ourselves free of that hail of lead. Cautiously I looked out. The two other soldiers were slumped on the floor in twisted heaps, their guns discarded. Fear turned to anger as I looked out over the square. It was littered with placards and the bodies of the dead or dying. Papers blew, scattering in the breeze. Soldiers were running amok among the fleeing people.

“I ran down the steps and picked up one of the fallen weapons. A woman did the same - one of many anonymous heroes the Revolution produced. Two more soldiers appeared in my field of vision so I opened fire, feeling my whole body vibrate as the gun chattered. They fell to the ground. I couldn't hear the sounds of the slaughter anymore. Only this terrible roaring sound in my ears. I was angry.

“A fresh burst of gunfire tore across the flagstones ahead of us, alerting me to more Terran troops. A squad was running towards us. There was no way of escape other than the department store so I rushed madly back up the steps. A burst shattered the glass doors, and the people around me rushed into the store. Once inside the woman fired at the troops, while the rest of us ran through the ground floor, stumbling in the darkness and crashing through displays of expensive designer clothes.

“The soldiers entered the building cautiously. On seeing us they opened fire and killed at least three people. The woman fired again as I kicked open the emergency doors on the far side of the floor. At least two soldiers fell, the others fled the building as we filed out into safety.

“Once outside we slumped to the ground, exhausted and suffering from shock, but relieved to be alive.”

“I stopped in terror as armed men came into view. They regarded me impassively as the others approached. Seeing the armed newcomers, the people behind me moaned, and several fell to their knees to plead for their lives. I was exhausted, my breath was coming in gasps and my heart was thumping. I thought I was going to die, but a voice cut through the fatigue-haze.

“Quick, get inside the truck. We’ll hide you!”

“It dawned on me that these were militia. A wave of relief swept through me, and we hastily clambered into their truck. I stumbled over a body as I climbed in. Shock quickly faded to surprise as I saw that it bore the marks of a militia officer. In exhausted fear, we sat in the truck and tried to ignore the Terran’s accusing stare. A few people were crying faintly, and being comforted by others. From outside I could here the sounds of a debate.

“Are we just going to sit here?” a voice asked.

“It’s nothing to do with us. We’re militia, not politicians or revolutionaries. We’ve got to stay neutral!”

“Neutral!” another voice exclaimed. “We’ve just shot the Lieutenant and you want neutrality? We’re in it up to our necks now!”

“Listen, damn you! We’re supposed to defend our people, and what are we doing? Skulking in side streets!” The first voice exclaimed. An uncomfortable silence followed, then a voice demanded a vote be taken.

“From inside the truck we heard the sound of a heavy engine. With a screech of brakes the vehicle stopped. I peered through the canvas cover of the truck to see what was going on. Outside, there was a Terran jeep with three soldiers. An officer stood beside it and he regarded the militia coldly.

“‘What are you men doing here?’ the Terran officer growled. The militia lounged against the truck, eyeing the Terrans morosely. ‘Where is your officer, Sergeant?’

“The Sergeant didn’t reply.

“‘Must I repeat myself, man?’ the Terran asked angrily. ‘Damned ignorant colonials!’

“The officer pulled out his sidearm and pointed the muzzle towards the Sergeant. ‘I order you to engage the terrorists. Failure to obey an officer is mutiny -‘

A gun chattered hungrily. The officer fell against the jeep and slumped to the ground. The other Terrans raised their weapons, but the militia sprayed the jeep and its occupants in a deadly hail of gunfire.

“The roar of their automatic weapons ceased. The air reeked of gunsmoke, blood and diesel fumes. In silence, the militia stared at the dead, realising what it meant.

“‘Look’s like a unanimous vote,’ the Sergeant said.

Chapter 7

OCTOBER 9th was the blackest day of the Revolution. It became known as Black October. Nearly three thousand people were killed by Terran troops. Thousands more were injured. Similar attacks took place all over Greycorridor. The Government was determined to restore order, by any means necessary, but this massacre was by far the worst.

Troops ransacked the square and the surrounding streets for several hours, but they didn't get everything their own way. People resisted, fought back, dared to take on the Terrans. It was unthinkable, unheard of, but they did it all the same. If they were unable to seize automatic weapons from soldiers who fell to a mob, then they hurled stones or petrol bombs. Those that escaped the killing ground, were then faced by the vicious onslaught of the riot police. Attacked with shield, club, riot gun, electro-prod, and gas. Thousands were arrested, but many thousands also escaped. Thanks to the militia.

Several units engaged the Terrans. Having shot their officers in the face of the massacre, they had committed mutiny, but they found themselves unable to stand aside while people were slaughtered. Many of these militiamen and women fell defending Peterloo Square, but they killed many Terran troops and allowed thousands of people to escape who otherwise would have been brutally murdered.

Despite the militia's intervention, the day still belonged to the Terrans. The massacre, Dutton believed, finally rid the Government of the threat. Steadman lost his popularity, once it became common knowledge that the police escorted him to safety. The Opposition Coalition was in disarray. The planet was in shock.

The day after the massacre Dutton followed up this operation with mass arrests. Offices were again closed. Papers suppressed. Over the next few days, trials took place of lesser Opposition leaders and those involved in the rally. Then, many these victims of Terran justice were executed.

In the horror that followed Black October, nobody asked where the Terran troops came from. The workers had taken control of the rail networks. The arterial roads entering the city had been watched on the day of the march. It was later

discovered that the troops were airlifted in several days before. For that time, they kept themselves hidden in empty warehouses by the airport. From there, they drove towards Peterloo Square. Dutton's death squads were already in the city when the march took place. It was clear that this was a carefully planned operation.

"AS the days passed it became obvious that the Opposition Coalition was broken," Carter said. "The mass arrests broke their organisations, and their papers were shut down, as it turned out permanently. They had been so confident - over-confident in fact. The Coalition groups operated openly, once the people took control of the streets. Because of that, the Government knew all about them and where to find them.

"Many of their best people were killed or arrested. Many others were too frightened to take on the Government anymore. Yet Dutton wasn't in the clear yet. The middle class parties were smashed, the workers' organisations were hurt, but we still hadn't given up the fight!"

"It took several days to regroup, but again we came out on strike. We concentrated on those areas important to administering the planet. We took the rail networks, communication links, ports and so on. The planet was crippled again, as the working class wiped the smug grin off Dutton's face.

"Do you want to know another thing?" Carter asked. "The office workers began to flock to the working class parties. With their assistance, we squeezed our enemies hard. Government departments were closed, the offices of big business came to a halt. Only the security forces were able to operate."

NIDEL sat silently as he listened to Carter. For him the Revolution ended at this point. Dutton did what the workers thought they would need to do. The Terran troops swept aside the middle class opposition, leaving the field clear for a clash between Terran capitalism and the Greyermede proletariat. The middle ground withered and perished in the heat of class struggle.

"OUR own organisations remained underground, except to operate in the factories and workplaces," Carter said. "Here the security forces found it damn hard to suppress us, unless they first smashed the workers who gathered there. The Opposition Coalition possessed few such points of union. They sought the alliance of all social groups, and so operated outside in the cities - a very

vulnerable place to be as they found out to their cost.”

STILL in hiding, Karl Minsky made his first open broadcast to the planet. From one of a growing number of ‘pirate’ television stations controlled by ordinary people, he publicly laughed in the face of the Government. ‘Comrades! People of Greyermede!’ he greeted the colony. ‘The bloody fist of counter-revolution has struck the face of our struggle for liberation. Dutton and Earth have revealed their true colours to us. There can be no compromise with such a bloodthirsty opponent. Either capitalist tyranny crushes us, in which case the bloodshed of the 9th will seem insignificant by contrast, or we take the power for ourselves, and end the poverty, the repression and the violence of capitalism.

“‘This is no idle dream, as our opponents call it. Daily the workers have proved their readiness for such a step. Many factories and offices are now in the hands of the workers. It is only a matter of these elected councils broadening their scope to take on the civil functions of the discredited Colonial regime.

“‘A spark, that is what our movement represents. A spark that will ignite a revolutionary fire throughout the colonised galaxy. Today capitalism trembles. It sees with horrible clarity that its days are numbered. The workers are coming, and we shall build socialism on the bones of the giant corporations. Greyermede has shown the way forward. The proletariat of other worlds will surely follow.’”

Minsky issued an ultimatum calling for the Government to step down, an ultimatum the workers knew would not be realised without a struggle. Of peaceful roads to their goal, they knew of none. Any such road would have ended in a one-sided slaughter as the middle class opposition groups discovered.

The Government needed to be deposed by force, they wouldn’t go without a fight. Yet, the workers were largely unarmed, while their enemies were bolstered by heavily armed Terran troops. Uncertainty was rife. Could the workers, with all their growing organisation and their bravery, defeat the most skilled military force in the galaxy?

The question rested on the militia. What would they do? What were they thinking? Then thousands of faxes and e-mails began to be received in offices and workplaces all over the city:

TO THE REVOLUTIONARY WORKERS OF TRAFALGAR.

Comrades! The criminal acts of the Colonial Government have shown it to be the enemy of the people. After great debate, the militia of the Holton Garrison has arrested its officer corps and elected its own Militia Revolutionary Committee. We offer our protection to the workers of the city against counter-revolution, and we call upon the working class to take the political as well as the economic power.

Down with capitalism! Long live the Revolution!

The Militia Revolutionary Committee

THE STORM BREAKS

Chapter 8

OCTOBER was passing into November and Greyermede was gripped in civil war. All over the planet the people were arming; assisted by militia regiments that defected to the Revolution. The cities became battlegrounds as the security forces of the old order fell under siege.

Not only was the colony gripped by the bloody ferment of civil war, but also remnants of the old Opposition Coalition, resurrected in the guise of shadowy terrorist organisations. Gone were the old 'respectable' party leaders and would-be professional politicians. These new organisations were filled with the bloodthirsty zeal of younger, extreme activists. Many students, their heads filled with romantic nonsense about the heroism of a liberation struggle, and guided by the more militant section of the intelligentsia, besieged the Government with assassinations and bombings.

The most prominent of these terrorist groups named itself 'Black October'. It swore vengeance on those that 'killed' Greyermede's glorious revolution, and handed the world to the Communists. The Government found itself in an impossible situation, but still it clung to its power, such as it was.

As ever, the heart of the Revolution was to be found in Trafalgar and I still hadn't been able to leave Firsthaven. This was the only city that was fully in Government control. As a city under siege, it was difficult to get into. It was also damn difficult to leave. The authorities didn't seem to want to lose our presence, thus we journalists were trapped.

News did filter through to us from outside. The reports told of street battles between armed workers and the Terran military. The workers stormed government and police buildings. Thousands of the old regime's functionaries were arrested and languished in gaols that previously incarcerated revolutionaries.

It was so frustrating being stuck inside Firsthaven. I wanted out badly, but I had to bide my time along with the rest of the journalists. We made ourselves busy by filing humdrum reports of events in the city, or the hearsay from the rest of the colony. We even interviewed Government officials when they deigned to make themselves available.

The official reason for our forced internal exile was protection. Outside the city, the Government's spin doctors said, the Government couldn't guarantee us any degree of personal safety. So we should be grateful and make full use of the doctored reports issued to us by the Press Office.

One thing the Government's propaganda cronies couldn't cover up was the aura of the city. It felt under siege. One could feel the tension of a Government whose forces and authority were daily under squeeze.

In the face of the armed people, the Government was sinking deeper into the quagmire.

ALAN Cohen was a Sergeant in the militia, one of those elected by his comrades to sit on the Holton Garrison's Militia Revolutionary Committee. Life in the militia was tough, but he never thought it would get tougher - until he was elected. There was a lot for him to do, it was hard work, stressful, but it was for a worthwhile cause.

"The barracks had such an intense electric aura. The officers were gone. The rank and file didn't have to obey arrogant fools, but took orders from their own elected representatives.

"There was a lot to organise now we commanded ourselves. Some of my comrades on the committee were in negotiation with the GCP leaders about the defence of the city. I was involved with organising the barracks. Faxes and other communiqués were arriving from all over the region, telling us about the massing of counter-revolutionary forces. Not that we needed telling about the dangers they posed.

"Soon after we elected our committee, there was a brief fight with the Terran troops responsible for Black October. They were stationed at our garrison, while they awaited reassignment. Once the Terrans found out what was happening they tried to put a stop to it. Arguments, and attempts to give us orders, descended into gunplay. Several people were killed on both sides. The Terrans were outnumbered, and outgunned on this occasion; they took to their vehicles and stormed out of the compound, guns blazing. That victory heartened my comrades, I can tell you, but there was remorse, too, over our dead friends.

"The big issue in those days was arming the workers of the city. Some were worried about the disorder and the violence that may occur if weapons were

handed out to just anybody. Despite this debate, it needed sorting quickly. Only if the people were armed could the threat of counter-revolution be tackled, but those in charge of the armoury refused to budge, despite the heated debates and the appeals of the workers' representatives.

“In the end it took the intervention of Howard Kramer⁶ to sort the issue out. In a heated mass meeting he argued bluntly for the arming of the workers. Militiamen and women were packed into the mess hall to hear the debate. I was seated at the head of the hall, with the rest of the Militia Revolutionary Committee. The hall was thick with the stench of cigarette smoke, and filled with the excited babble of many voices.

“‘Comrades!’ Private Hussain, the Chairman, cried to the assembled ranks. ‘We’ve gathered here to discuss a crucial question for the Revolution. As you know the forces of counter-revolution are gathering, yet there are those who oppose the arming of the workers. The situation is becoming dire. So Howard has asked to speak to you.’

“Hussain opened the floor to the ranks. The Armoury Sergeant leapt to his feet to address the meeting. ‘We didn’t elect our own leaders to appoint an irresponsible power!’ he cried. ‘Arm the workers and we arm the forces of anarchy. I was against joining the side of the GCP, I was for neutrality until the establishment of a constitutional authority, as you all know.’ Jeers and insults met his words, but the Sergeant was unperturbed by his reception.

“‘You have voted to join forces with the workers, and I respect that decision as a believer in democracy. However I cannot allow the workers to be armed. Already the streets are filled with lawlessness, how much worse would that become if the streets were flooded with guns? We are the militia. It is our duty to defend the people, and so we must be the defenders of the Revolution!’

“The Sergeant sat down, in a huff. Another soldier sprang up. ‘Comrades!’ he began. ‘I am a member of the GCP, and a worker at heart, although I was forced to wear this uniform. I say the workers must be armed. They are the builders of this Revolution, and they must defend it. We have weapons, and we cannot hold onto them! If we do, we set ourselves up as a separate power above the heads of the people.’ The soldier sat down to cheers, and a few insults. More uniformed men and women stood up, arguing for the arming of the workers, or against. At last Hussain stood up once more to address the ranks.

“Comrade Kramer has come here to discuss just these points,’ he said evenly. ‘The vote to support the Revolution means we must co-operate with the revolutionary workers. If they require arms, we should provide them. We are no longer a force separate from the revolutionary masses. That is the view of the Committee. But it is for you to decide. Are there any objections to Kramer speaking?’

“A few of the militia raised their voices in objection. Those who opposed the arming of the workers and many that wanted the militia to remain neutral. But the combined voice of the rest drowned them out until they fell into silence. The meeting would hear what Kramer had to say.

“Kramer approached the stand, walking calmly down the central aisle of the mess hall. Looking tired he approached the podium and gazed down at the packed hall, studying the hundreds of faces wreathed in the clouds of cigarette smoke. Kramer was something different to what these militia troops had seen or heard before. They expected a media-compatible personality like the middle class leaders. Instead they got a tired, unshaven worker wearing jeans, a grubby shirt and a battered jacket.

“Comrades!’ his nervous voice began. ‘I represent the revolutionary workers of Trafalgar. I need not tell you that the forces of counter-revolution are gathering. To beat them the workers must be armed, as you’ve heard so often now. I hear words of caution here tonight, that the workers are no more than a mob. Well that mob has pulled down the mighty towers of capitalism, and today runs things for its own needs. Would you set yourselves above that?’

“Would you turn your backs on your revolutionary comrades? Once, many of you were workers, before you were forced into those uniforms. Today you are workers again. When you voted to join the Revolution, you ceased to be militia. Now you are revolutionaries. And your fellow revolutionaries need your assistance.

“I understand your fears about lawlessness and anarchy on the streets. Since the state power began to crumble, anti-social elements have descended to make the most of their opportunities. But look to the factories and the workplaces, where revolutionary order is in place. The workers have displayed only the best of revolutionary discipline.

“Let me tell you that, even as I speak, delegates of all the revolutionary parties are meeting to discuss the election of a city council to be composed of representatives from all the workplaces and communities. The militia is also invited to join this city’s new governing body. It will restore order to Trafalgar and in co-operation with your own committee will wage the fight against counter-revolution. Only by disciplined action will we beat our enemies, but we won’t do it without arms.’

“The appeal finished, Kramer slowly stepped down and walked back down the aisle. Pausing briefly to light a cigarette, he left the mess hall in a tumultuous uproar. He had said his piece, now the militia would decide one way or the other.

“‘Vote!’ people shouted. Others said the issue had not been discussed sufficiently. Everybody present was clamouring to be heard, or talking it over amongst friends and associates.

“‘Haven’t we argued enough?’ a militia-woman shouted above the racket. ‘It’s time to vote!’

“Private Hussain stood up and called for the meeting to be silent. ‘I think the general feeling is for the vote,’ he said. ‘Those in favour of opening the armoury?’

“A mighty roar met the question, beyond a doubt the majority. The ‘nay-sayers’ simply scowled at the rest as they sat in their little groups, like conspirators plotting some dark deed.

“‘I think that’s the issue decided. The keys, Sergeant?’

“The Armoury Sergeant looked as though he was about to argue, but then he unclipped his keycard and handed it to the chairman. ‘On your head be it!’”

Chapter 9

ON a hot and bright October morning, I stood in my hotel room, overlooking the financial sector of the city. Firsthaven was quiet as it always was at that time during the civil war. The streets were empty, though later they would fill with people. The city may have been under virtual siege, but life still went on as normally as possible.

Occasionally a truck roared past, loaded with Terran troops fully equipped for war. Officers in blue berets stared sullenly from windows that had been opened to let in the breeze. Police helicopters patrolled the skies, sometimes accompanied by military gunships.

It was another typical, boring day. The planet had erupted in flames. Stories were occurring all around me, but I was trapped in the city by the authorities. I wanted to taste the Revolution for myself, rather than languish in my hotel room, which was fast becoming a prison.

The flatscreen was blared aloud, but I ignored it and continued staring out of the window. The glass towers of colonial capitalism glistened in the sun. Two blocks away, I could see the stock exchange building, empty ever since the markets fell, and no chance of them improving while the Revolution raged. If it was victorious then there would never again be a stock market for greedy speculators to make a packet through that form of high-class gambling; where the chips were company shares and the lives of millions of innocent people were gambled away.

My attention was suddenly pulled to the flatscreen by the flat, nasal tones of Governor Dutton. The colony's unelected leader was standing at a podium behind a number of microphones displaying labels such as NBS7, MNN8, RNS9 and so on. Behind him there was a huge Terran flag, with the Greyermede colonial emblem hanging from a stand on either side. Dutton himself was dressed in his usual expensive suit, with a rather loud tie adorning his crisp, white shirt. He looked tired, and there was a shadow of stubble on his face.

“Sir!” one of the journalists cried out. “Penny Marshall, Martian News Network. How are you responding to the threat from the terrorists?”

Dutton turned to face the woman, and smiled briefly. “Everything is in hand,

Penny,” he replied. “You can rest assured that the militia, with the assistance of our friends from Home, are doing their best to bring order back to the colony. The Government is sure that the situation will be dealt with soon.”

“But isn’t it true that much of the militia has defected?” a fat, perspiring journalist asked in a strong Terran accent.

Dutton looked sharply at the man, and hesitated before replying. “There has been mutiny and desertion in the militia, yes. But most regiments have remained loyal. Let me assure you: the Communists will not be taking this world from its hard-working citizens!”

The camera zoomed in on Dutton’s sincere, but hurt looking face. “But to those who have deserted I will say this, you have been duped by demagogues and trouble-makers hell bent on disrupting our once ordered world. Return to your barracks. Release your officers and hand over the ringleaders and no more will be said of this affair. You have my personal word of honour.”

The camera zoomed out and panned to focus on another of the journalists gathered in the conference room. “Ben Saunders, Reuters News Service. A lot of people in the rest of the galaxy are worried about the situation. It’s had quite an effect on the stock markets, will the situation be resolved soon?”

“All I can tell you is that we are working hard to resolve this crisis. Nobody likes bloodshed and violence, but we didn’t start this war. We will certainly finish it. Just because a few thugs and trouble-makers want to run riot isn’t going to put a stop to efficient government, or prevent hard-working businessmen from creating the wealth that’s made this colony so prosperous -”

I switched off the television in disgust. That display wasn’t news, it was propaganda pure and simple. Though isn’t that the role of the media? That millions of toiling fingers were reaching out for freedom and democracy didn’t warrant a column inch. A few greedy plutocrats were losing a fortune on the stock markets and pandemonium broke loose, decrying anarchy, lawlessness and theft.

I’d had enough of being cooped up in my hotel. I got my jacket and left the room. On the way through the lobby, I caught sight of some of the other hacks lounging about in the bar. They were watching Dutton’s press conference on a flatscreen dominating one whole side of a wall. Cynical comments and

observations met some of Dutton's comments. I ignored them and walked out into the bright sunlight, pausing briefly to put on some shades. After a lifetime under the Martian sky, it takes some time to get used to bright, blue skies.

It was a lonely walk through the city streets. Not many people were about, but some of the shops had opened their doors in the forlorn hope of doing some trade. Firsthaven was an eerie place. It seemed desolate and deserted. Workers here were also on strike and no amount of threats managed to get them back to work. Those helicopters that patrolled the skies and the troop carriers raging through the streets were a stark reminder to the good citizens of Trafalgar - the enemy was within as well as without and they worked in the factories and the shops and the offices of this very city.

I stopped briefly by the Law Courts to enjoy the shade beneath the trees that decorated the forecourt. The building was fortified. Behind coils of razor wire and sandbagged machine gun emplacements, bleary-eyed troops watched the street. Lawyers and the occasional judge strolled in and out of the building. The presence of the troops seemed to trouble them little, although even they needed a pass to enter the building.

One of the sentries began to regard me curiously. I took that as my cue to leave and I hurried down the street. A police helicopter flew overhead, its rotors making that distinctive chopping noise as they sliced through the air. The helicopter's distorted reflection moved over the surface of the glittering glass fingers as it flew low over its patrol route, occasionally lost as a window caught the direct reflection of the sun's glare. A truck roared around the corner, its radio blaring loudly as it transported its cargo of militia.

It was all beginning to make me feel like a fugitive. I longed to see just one other person out on the streets, other than the authorities. Through these empty streets, I continued to walk until I came across a police patrol car parked on a quiet corner. The car seemed innocent enough, or so it would in normal times. Now it looked sinister, and the feelings of random guilt began to pound in my chest. I didn't know where to look for fear of attracting unwanted attention. So, I chose to look straight ahead. Difficult under the gaze of the shadows occupying the car - until I got close enough to see the bullet holes.

The radio squawked loudly with some police controller trying to raise the occupants. They ignored it as only dead men can. Flies buzzed around the car as

the two occupants sat and stared ahead. Their uniforms were drenched in blood, already congealing around ugly holes in their chests.

My footsteps crunched loudly as I ground the fragments of the shattered windscreen underfoot. A metallic noise caused me to look down, revealing spent bullet cases. On the ground, I noticed a card. Curious, I picked it up and saw the image of the Grim Reaper. It was a tarot card of Death, the adopted sign of Black October. Yes, the enemy was within as well as without.

It was time to leave before more police arrived, or soldiers asking awkward questions about why I was there. They wouldn't be too concerned about arresting an innocent passer-by. I hurried away down the street, leaving the flies to their feast, and the cops to their silent vigil in the next world.

AFTER my grisly discovery, I decided to take a more direct route towards Commerce Square, where the main government buildings are located. The area was a virtual fortress. Razor wire and military vehicles barricaded the streets. One could only enter by showing identification to the police that watched over the fortifications.

I took my place in a short queue of people waiting to enter the square. The ominous bulk of a Terran troop carrier loomed above us. The vehicle's steely-eyed commander watched us, with one arm resting on a mounted machine gun.

"Papers!" Hastily I showed the sentry my passport, removing my sunglasses so he could get a good look at my face. The officer regarded my passport for a long time, and then switched his focus to stare at me with fierce eyes.

"What's your business?"

"I want papers out of the city. I've got a job to do, after all."

The officer said nothing. His expression was unreadable, but I sensed his boredom. Without a word, he returned my documents and I entered the square. It was ominous with activity. Military vehicles were parked in corners, mostly troop carriers, but by the statue of Nigel Chamberlain¹⁰ I saw a tank parked askew. The vehicle's commander barked orders at a group of soldiers standing beneath its menacing bulk. At its rear, a group of grimy engineers investigated the machine's engine.

The air was filled with the sound of shrieked orders. NCOs mercilessly drilled the rank and file troops. Heavy boots thundered on the flagstones in perfect unison, and the diesel engines added to the sounds of a fortress under war footing. A gunship roared overhead, downdraft whipping at the litter on the flagstones, the thrashing of its rotors bombarding my ears. It came in to land on the eastern side of the square, and heavily armed troops leapt out.

As I approached the Board of Colonial Affairs, a young militia sentry stopped me and asked for my papers. Sighing, I dug out my passport and handed it to him. He studied it even more closely than the police officer at the entrance to the square until I began to feel pangs of random guilt.

“You heard about the defections,” I asked, more to break my tension than anything else, “what do you think of it all?”

“They’re traitors! They’ve turned their backs on the Motherworld for some foolish dream, but we’ll give them a dose of reality.”

“Anybody you know gone over, any friends?”

The soldier stared at me and the anger in the boy’s eyes was truly frightening. “If they’ve gone over, they’re not my friends!”

I left the soldier. Rich powermongers on a distant world he had never seen, would spend his life without a second thought in the defence of their privileges. I shook my head in pity for this young lad, barely 18, who clung indignantly to his sense of duty, and never once questioned what he was told. It was one small tragedy in a swelling ocean.

Inside the building, the air was cooler, but it was crawling with people. Civil servants hurried about on their business, stumbling and cursing as they struggled through the crowds of soldiers billeted there. Windows were heavily sandbagged, reducing the light to a depressing gloom. Every available space was stacked with arms and ammunition.

Some important-looking official in a smart business suit stormed angrily out of a room, proclaiming to the world in general his opposition to the conference room being turned into a makeshift field hospital. Nobody paid him any attention and he stomped off in a huff.

Stumbling between the soldiers, I made my way to the lift. A sign suggested it was for officers' use only. I ignored it and took the lift up to the second floor. The doors opened onto another corridor packed with soldiers. The stench of so many sweating bodies was very nearly overpowering, despite the building's air conditioning being turned on full blast. I'm glad I didn't have to work there. It was stifling.

Slowly I made my way to the office dealing with transport passes. I wasn't surprised by the lack of a queue, and I sat down at a desk where a harassed looking official was busy flicking through papers.

"Hahem!" I coughed, to make my presence known. The official looked up and abruptly slipped the papers into a drawer.

"Good morning, what can I do for you?" she asked with forced politeness. Perspiration beaded her forehead, and her eyes suggested fatigue behind her thin glasses.

I showed her my passport before speaking. "I'm Sue Reid, of the Martian Chronicle. I'd like passes for myself and several of my colleagues."

"I'm sorry Ms Reid, but we can't allow foreign journalists beyond the city limits, safety reasons you understand -"

"I understand certain reporters have been allowed to leave the city."

"Only under very special circumstances. And at the understanding that the Government of Greyermede would hold no responsibility for their safety."

I smiled and slid my press credentials over. "But mine is a special circumstance."

The official looked at the hundred Yen note I had slipped beneath my card. She stared at it for some time, then casually - a well-practised movement in fact - she slipped the money into her pocket.

"Yes, I understand. How many passes will you need?"

"Oh, half a dozen," I replied casually. The woman took out a number of pre-printed cards signed with the Police Minister's name, and countersigned them.

Then she slipped them over towards me.

“Just get your colleagues to sign these passes, and they can be used right away.”

“Thank you!” I hastily pocketed the passes. Then I made my way out of the building as quickly as I could. As I left, I wished I’d lubricated the wheels of bureaucracy a little earlier.

MANY of the journalists were still in the lobby-bar when I returned. I walked in feeling hot and tired but eager to get underway. A few of the journalists shouted a greeting. I just strode up to the centre of the bar waving the passes in my hand.

“Okay, you armchair newshounds, who wants to leave the city?”

I must admit I’d hoped for a better response. “What, go out into bandit country?” someone said. Most of the others declined my offer. They were too comfortable claiming their drinks-expenses, and going through the press releases to bother going anywhere else. Let the Revolution come to them, seemed to be the general attitude.

My passes did attract some interest, though. Chris Harding, the Chronicle photographer I was working with, jumped at the chance to leave Firsthaven. So did a couple of others. That left two passes spare with no takers. I threw them down on a beer stained table and walked out. No snide comments followed. That surprised me, maybe I’d struck a few consciences.

TWO hours later Chris and I were on the road. We had a car at our disposal, courtesy of the Press Office, and were heading for the M286 to Teliote. The city-exit was guarded by militia troops. Machine guns had been mounted on either side of the road, covering both approaches to and from the city.

Chris stopped the car as one of the militiamen flagged us down. “Passes!” he bellowed. I handed the documents to Chris, who then handed them to the guard. He studied them for a few moments before returning them. With a wave of his arm, the militiaman signalled the barrier to be opened and waved us on.

Gratefully we drove through the barrier. We were in Red territory now, and a brief shiver of fear did pass through my body. Here Government authority was worth little, even to Government troops.

Thankfully, the journey was uneventful. We passed kilometres of swaying cereal crops to the north. There was little traffic on the road. After about two hours, the city of Teliote loomed ahead. This was one of many regions contested by both sides. We would be watching as they struggled to take the city. It would be interesting to see who conquered.

Chapter 10

TRAFALGAR was beset by class struggle, white hot and furious. Armed by the militia, the workers engaged the Terran troops and armed police. Untrained and inexperienced the workers of the city were doing the seemingly impossible: they were defeating one of the most terrible killing machines in the galaxy. All their state-of-the-art hardware did not help the Terran military put down the armies of the workers.

In street battle after street battle, the soldiers fled, leaving the dead and scores of weapons to further arm the builders of the Revolution.

As the fighting progressed, order was slowly restored to the districts under Red control. Volunteer bands of workers, under the control of the newly elected workers' Council, worked to keep the peace and stop the looting and anarchy that had befallen since the collapse of the Colonial state's authority. The Council took over the running of the city; electricity, communications, transport, distribution of food and other necessary goods, co-ordination of the hospitals and medical facilities, and a host of other essential services.

To the Militia Revolutionary Committee was charged the defence of the Revolution. Under its elected high command, a more than adequate job of combating the Terran troops was executed. The city was fast falling to the Reds.

"WE were waiting," Carter said. "The fear and apprehension was a physical presence. You could smell it in the air, hear it in the strange silence of the city, feel its cold tentacles slithering down the spine. Life was on hold as the future waited for the dawn.

"After days of hard fighting, the Red Guard and the militia were gathered in the streets around the Central Police Station. Here the counter-revolutionary forces awaited their last stand. They knew they were lost, but futile pride - or perhaps deadly fear - demanded they stay and fight to the last.

"The minutes passed by like years. The moons sank beneath the level of sight, behind the dark towers of the city. Slowly the sun rose behind the buildings, highlighting them ever more starkly as tall silhouettes. As dawn progressed our vision extended. Cautiously I looked down Vernon Drive, casting my eyes over

the fortified structure of the police station at its far end.

“The street was barricaded with abandoned cars. Coils of razor wire further protected the approaches, leaving only a small gap by which vehicles and troops could come and go. The barricades and sandbagged fortifications of the police station could just be made out in the dull light.

“Thousands of workers and militia troops waited nervously for the attack. Nobody uttered a word. They just sat staring into space or toyed nervously with the weapons they were only just beginning to get used to handling.

“As the sun came into view, a jeep drove towards our positions. A white flag was tied to the radio aerial, which fluttered in the breeze. Howard Kramer, and Ahmed Hussain of the city Council and Militia Revolutionary Committee sat in the vehicle. Hussain chewed his lower lip, Kramer’s forehead glistened in the poor light, and his eyes held a distant look.

“‘Comrades!’ Kramer shouted as the jeep came to a halt. ‘As representatives of the revolutionary masses we are going to try one last time and avoid this senseless slaughter! We go under a flag of truce to demand that our enemies lay down their arms. Let us hope that they see the sense in this course of action.’

“‘Good luck!’ somebody shouted. It was well meant, but at the same time contained little hope. Nobody really believed the enemy would lay down their arms without a fight.

“Kramer sat down again, his face almost as pale as the flag. The vehicle jerked into motion and drove slowly down Vernon Drive. We watched in apprehension as it stopped a little way towards the barricades. Kramer was a little figure in the distance, dwarfed by the enormity of the buildings and the barricade, and perhaps by the events that had swept us all up, even as we created them.

We caught the distant sounds of his voice, amplified and made harsh by a megaphone.

“‘Followers of Earth!’ he cried. ‘We, the representatives of the revolutionary masses of this city, have come to grant you one last chance. Lay down your arms and surrender. Your safety is guaranteed if you give up your hopeless position. There is no need for this senseless -‘

The sharp crack of a rifle drowned out his words. Kramer collapsed into his seat. The jeep swung round and raced madly towards our positions. Gunfire followed in its wake.

“‘There’s our answer,’ someone said to me. I nodded in reply. There had been little likelihood of any other outcome. The jeep screeched to a halt, and the driver screamed for a medic. Kramer sat in his seat moaning. Blood stained his shirt. The bullet had struck him in the shoulder but he was lucky that he had come out so lightly from his attempt to avert a fight.

“The time had come. Behind me I heard the muttered words of someone in prayer. Fear spread through us, but also a grim determination. By nightfall the city would be ours, but we knew there would be many dead to bury afterwards. Then the order came to attack, breaking the tension in a rush of adrenaline.

“A militia troop carrier rumbled down the street, its mounted guns chattering as it advanced. Behind it the armed workers and militia advanced. Down the street, points of light flashed as our enemy returned fire. Gouts of dust erupted as bullets tore down the street, and smashed into the Terran barricades, sometimes finding a human mark. Comrades fell around me, crying in agony as a bullet found its target. From further away came the sounds of fresh gunfire as revolutionaries assaulted the enemy position from other streets bordering the police station.

“Soldiers appeared on our flank as we approached. Guns flared and several of my comrades went down. The fire was returned. I squeezed the electronic trigger of my assault rifle, feeling it kick into life. Explosions of blood ripped across the bodies of several of our attackers as the armour-piercing bullets bit eagerly into flesh. The remaining troops fled into the cover of the building, pursued by detachments of Red Guard and militia.

“The barricades were coming closer when the sound of a heavy diesel engine emerged above the noise of battle. A Terran tank turned the corner and came towards us. The muzzle of its gun spat flames and roared. The armoured personnel carrier erupted in flame and lazily crashed through a shop front.

“Cries of terror erupted all around me. The tank turned its attention to us. Heavy machine guns tore great holes in our ranks as we ran for cover behind abandoned cars and shop fronts. Slowly it came ever forward. Behind it were the shadowy

figures of troops and armed police, shrouded in smoke from the fire. The tank was beyond our small arms, but we engaged those soldiers in a bitter fight.

“Two militiamen ran up to a car opposite me. The tank was coming closer, grinding the dead under its armoured tracks. One man cradled a shoulder-launched anti-tank missile in his arms. On the other side of the street the militiaman left his cover, and crouched in the armoured monster’s path as we distracted the enemy’s attention.

“The missile fired, leaving a trail of dense, white smoke. The shell struck and a terrible boom echoed down the street as the warhead exploded. A great ball of flame blossomed, thick black smoke billowed at its edge. As the smoke cleared the tank emerged from its dark veil, unharmed. The militiaman was cut down in the street as the tank opened fire again.

“I thought this tank would defeat us, but then fragments of glass cascaded onto the street and the roar of many guns blasted from the first floor windows. The troops behind fled in disarray. Then Red Guard and militia leapt from the window and landed on top of the tank. Several were killed by gunfire but enough kept coming, braving the bullets to bind the tank’s intakes in oily rags. Even a tank such as that needed to breathe. Impervious to chemical and biological weaponry, protected against nuclear fallout, it was not impervious to air. That was its Achilles Heel.

“The tank stopped as its engines failed. Its guns fell silent. Hatches began to open and its crew desperately gasped for air. A hail of lead met them as they abandoned their vehicle, and the revolutionaries stormed past the machine’s iron corpse.

“Another troop carrier roared by, blasting the barricades with its guns and smashing through the defences. Hordes of Red Guard and militia flooded through in its wake. Sweeping the barricades in bullets, we found only corpses as we breached their outer defences. Across the grounds we saw more of our comrades as they broke through. Swept up on this tide, the Terran troops and police were retreating to the court building and the police station. Many were consumed in the Red Tide, and many more fell as they ran.

“The enemy’s last haven was battered by a revolutionary storm. The buildings were surrounded by Red Guard and militia, taking cover behind abandoned

military vehicles and the troop carriers of the militia. Shots were exchanged, but we made no moves to assault the buildings. They were well fortified. Many would have been killed in the attempt to clear our enemies out.

“I leaned against a troop carrier. Exhausted, I wondered what would happen next. As I waited I looked about the grounds, searching for those I knew. The place was littered with the dead. Smoke drifted in misty coils on the breeze and the air was thick with the smell of gunsmoke and blood. The pool outside the courthouse was filled with bodies and the fountains sprayed pink. The water was drawn from the pool, and much blood had polluted it. On the edge of the pool the body of a Terran officer rested. One arm trailed lifelessly into the water, the officer’s eyes were staring blankly at me. The side of his skull had been blown away, the tattered remnants of his crimson-stained beret floated in the water as it lapped the edges.

“My thoughts pondered who the man might have been; was he really a savage killer, what lies led him to die so far away from home and his loved ones, wouldn’t he rather have been with them? I shivered and pushed the thoughts away. A battlefield is no place for such introspection. At home, with my loved ones, that would be the time.

“A voice was raised suddenly, echoing about the square in a sharp counterpoint to the earlier sounds of the fighting. One last attempt was being made to end the fighting.

“‘Lay down your arms!’ the speaker was shouting, I didn’t know who he was. ‘This is your last chance. If you don’t give up this pointless struggle then we’ll take steps to blast you out!’

“There was no reply to his words, but a strange silence descended. The words of the speaker quickly became clear as militiamen cautiously approached our positions, carrying heavy boxes between them. In a dreadful silence the boxes were broken open and the graceful forms of anti-tank missiles were revealed.

“A score of militiamen and women raised the weapons and sighted down their computer-targeting systems. Five rockets were fired through the glass doors of the courthouse, which shattered in a glittering cascade as the sun caught the fragments. Seconds later a series of explosions ripped through the building. A ball of orange flame gushed from the ruined doors, part of the roof was torn

away as flame and smoke and debris was blasted over the grounds. The shock waves smashed through the air in a dreadful boom. Another salvo was sent into the ravaged building. More flames and smoke engulfed the ruin.

“As the courts were bombarded so was the police station. Rocket salvos blasted through the main doors. They too blew outwards in a cascade of glass fragments as flame and smoke gushed out. The entire glass facade of the upper floors burst out as a ball of flame engulfed the building’s innards, showering the grounds with a hail of shattered glass and twisted metal. Fire began to greedily consume the rest of the building.

“The revolutionaries looked on as figures began to emerge from the smoke. Grimy and bloodstained, the survivors began to leave the building. Moaning hideously, injured men were helped by their comrades as the defeated enemy filed out slowly, fearfully. Arms raised in surrender they threw themselves on the mercy of the revolutionary masses and expected none.

“Surging triumphantly forward, the armies of the workers herded away the prisoners and stormed the building. Five minutes later the building was clear. The last haven of old Trafalgar was routed.

“The prisoners were taken away; the injured to the hospitals, the others to the old prisons where they were held, awaiting the outcome of the World Revolution.

“After a hard, desperate fight, the revolutionary masses won the day. Many were dead or injured. There was a lot to do but the rebuilding of the city could now begin. For that moment though, the victory had not yet sunk in. By nightfall the city would be in celebration. We were all a long way from that tragic day in October.”

THE RED TIDE

Chapter 11

FROM all over the world we heard news of cities falling to the workers, of the old regime crumbling. The remnants of the broadcasting services still in Government hands were hard-pressed to counter the Red message. In fact, they had lost the battle to control the airwaves.

Already party organisations were discussing the formation of the first workers' government. These people didn't even need to leave their own cities. With the assistance of the capitalists' old conferencing systems, party delegates talked to one-another over the divide. The elected representatives of the world's working class 'gathered' to form a historic new form of government. In thousands of buildings scattered across the colony, merged into one unit through the aid of satellite communication networks, a new democratic era was being forged.

IN the meantime Dutton and the old Government remained cooped up inside Firsthaven. Still they plotted and planned their conspiracies against the Revolution. Somehow deluded as to the real situation they faced. The media services that remained to them pumped out horror story after horror story concerning the 'atrocities' of the revolutionaries.

In Trafalgar, they were accused of mass murder. The soldiers and police were rounded up and killed en masse, the allegation ran. The Government poured abuse on the Revolution, its tone shocked and full of moral outrage. Seemingly, it forgot the massacres of unarmed civilians its own security forces conducted.

I was in Trafalgar by the time these accusations surfaced. More Government lies, I suspected, and I resolved to find the truth. The task didn't prove as difficult as I expected. The revolutionaries were eager to counter these allegations. They begged me to visit the old SecurCom Correction Centre where the uninjured prisoners were held. The place was way outside the city, but I agreed to go. The city's ex-mayor came along, since he made the initial accusation. Listening to his wittering hardly made the journey any more pleasant.

Inside the prison I was presented to the prisoners. "This is Sue Reid, a journalist from Mars. She has asked to see how we treat our prisoners, so we agreed to her coming here to speak to you," the militia Corporal said.

I was allowed to roam freely amongst the prisoners in the exercise yard. One of the inmates approached me urgently. “My family think I’m dead. Please, can you deliver this?” The man quickly pushed a folded envelope into my hand before I could answer. Then he disappeared into the crowd of prisoners. The letter was addressed to Montreal, Canada, Earth. The revolutionaries couldn’t inform his family of his well being. The Government wouldn’t for the sake its own propaganda.

“Well? What about your accusation now?” I asked the ex-mayor of the city, when we stood outside the prison gates once more.

“Don’t be a fool!” he retorted angrily. “Those are communists wearing the uniforms of their victims. Are you really so easily fooled Ms Reid?” The Corporal in charge of the prison just rolled his eyes before escorting us to our car.

THE next day I publicised my findings in a report on the revolutionaries’ broadcasting network. Still shots taken by Chris Harding were published in the city’s press and distributed through the press agencies all over the planet. Yet, the Government still insisted these men were all rotting in a hidden grave. The prisoner’s letter I posted to the Martian News Network press office in Trafalgar, for delivery off world. I never found out if it was delivered.

Of course, the Government was right in a way. The revolutionaries did commit the worst form of atrocity the Terran mind could envisage. The people of Greyermede seized ‘their’ property. And more than that, they assumed production for their own needs rather than offworld profit. A terrible atrocity indeed.

TIME was finally running out for the old Government in Firsthaven. Every day since the fall of Trafalgar, Minsky and other revolutionary leaders were on the television, appealing to the workers to overthrow the Revolution’s enemies. Members of the city Council issued proclamations and reports to the inhabitants. Handbills flooded the city streets, flysheets were posted on every available space, and communications networks buzzed with messages and information as the city organised for the conquest of Firsthaven.

In the City Hall, the Council and the Militia Revolutionary Committee exchanged frenzied faxes and phone messages with workers’ organisations

active in the capital, organising the final insurrection that would bring Greyernede fully into workers' control.

On the 19th December, everything was ready. Revolutionaries in Firsthaven were preparing. The Government's end was nigh.

Chapter 12

“AN urgent hammering woke me up,” Angela said. “Bleary-eyed, I groped for my alarm clock, the time was 10 a.m. I swore, and slowly crawled out of bed. When the hammering pounded against the door again, I thought it would be knocked off its hinges.

“All right, I’m coming!”

The door opened to reveal Jenny and Clare, a couple of friends from work. They lived a few streets away from me, but I hadn’t seen them for some time. Vaguely I wondered what they wanted that was so urgent.

“Christ! You’re not even dressed yet!” Jenny said as she walked through the door.

“Why? What’s wrong?”

“It’s started,’ Clare said. ‘The revolutionaries are coming!’

“What? When did all this happen?”

“Never mind, just get dressed. We’ve got to hurry.’

“Clare pushed me towards the stairs. I didn’t know what was going on, but I went along with them. Once dressed Jenny sat down on the settee and told me all about the morning’s events. The revolutionaries were coming to town; the final showdown with the Government was due sometime in the afternoon. The whole city’s working population was turning out to support the revolutionaries.

“Come on, let’s go,’ Clare said. We left my house and climbed into Jenny’s car. The streets were uncannily quiet on the way into the city centre. The car passed by rows of lifeless houses and empty streets.

“Where is everybody?”

“Just about everybody’s in town. Like I said, it’s the big day!’

“The car turned into the main road leading down into the city centre. The tall

buildings could now be seen, covered in a faint heat-haze. Jenny sped down the road and soon we were in the town centre.

“The difference was incredible. The streets suddenly filled with people. Thousands upon thousands milling about or wandering on some errand. It was as though every single shop had opened their doors for some monumental sale. Of course they hadn’t. Every shop we passed was closed or boarded up. From behind windows we caught sight of shop-owners or management staring out at the crowds with unconcealed hostility.

“Soon the roads themselves were packed with people. On street corners, crowds gathered to listen to speakers. Party activists or just ordinary citizens proclaimed news of the Revolution to an eager audience. Nowhere could we see a cop or soldier. The Government forces had melted away.

“The roads became too crowded for the car to go on any further. Jenny parked and we immersed ourselves in the crowd. A wall of noise pummelled my ears as thousands of chattering voices and shouted debates filled the air. People eagerly discussed politics. People who once upon a time would have only been interested in the latest sports results or the trivial rubbish in the latest tabloid rag.

“‘Where are we going, anyway?’ I asked. I didn’t know why they’d brought me, but I was glad they did. The atmosphere was great. It felt like one big party, and I could feel myself getting caught up in the excitement.

“‘The station!’ Angela replied. But she didn’t say why.

“Slowly we made our way towards the city’s main station. The closer we got the more activity emerged. Open air rallies. Heated debates between revolutionary workers and some of the middle class who turned up to see what was going on. Amidst the teeming sea of humanity I caught sight of people I vaguely recognised. I didn’t know them but I’d seen them before. Harassed looking individuals trying to sell papers, while keeping an eye out for cops, in calmer times before the Revolution. Now they were harassed again, but for different reasons. Hordes of people beset them, eager to buy the publications of any revolutionary party that happened to be around. Everybody was hungry for news from the rest of the colony.

“Someone pushed a handbill into my hand. Briefly, I scanned through it. It was hurriedly prepared and of poor quality, but it did the job of spreading

information about the proposals for the first workers' government of the planet. I threw it aside when I'd finished with it. It drifted on the breeze with the thousands of other handbills, like flakes of oversized snow, collecting in great drifts of paper.

“A great mass of people seemed to be going our way towards the station. Jenny, Clare and I joined the teeming throng. The crowd turned a corner in the street and there before us stood the huge, utilitarian facade of Firsthaven Station. I gasped in shock as I saw the building. It was draped in flags and banners. Everywhere I looked, red fists billowed in the breeze. Banners emblazoned with the GCP's initials adorned windows and doors, lampposts and walls.

“The station was filled with people. Outside, a police riot van and a Terran APC were parked. Their crews were gathered outside, positioned as though to attack the building.

“An officer yelled orders to those inside, but on our arrival he turned and gazed fearfully in our direction. For a moment, I thought they'd fire on us. Yet, the people around me displayed no fear. The officer barked orders at the men under his command. Clambering hastily into their vehicles, they fled, rumbling down the next street intersecting with the station's entrance. Behind them the station workers laughed and threw insults in their wake.

“It became clear what this crowd had gathered for. It was part of a planned objective to take the main station into the city. The crowd assembled outside the station, while others filed inside. Seemingly they were all waiting for something to happen, but I didn't know what. GCP activists began to race around organising the masses. One of them addressed the crowd with a megaphone.

“‘Your attention please!’ he shouted. ‘The station is now in the hands of the revolutionary workers. There is still no sign of the counter-revolutionaries anywhere in the city other than around the haven of the tyrant, Dutton. Please spread the word for the people to be vigilant. The enemy of socialism could strike at any time!’

“‘Let's go inside,’ Clare said to me. I followed my two friends into the station's main concourse. The display boards were blank. There had been no traffic for several days. Inside, the building was a hive of activity. Party activists from several revolutionary parties hurried to-and-fro, performing allotted tasks that

were a complete mystery to me.

“Clare! Jenny!’ someone shouted from across the concourse. We looked about for the speaker. A man waved from a cafe and approached us. His face was split in a grin and his eyes shone with excitement. On his arm was a band of red cloth signifying him as one of the GCP’s organisers. From his shoulder a machine pistol dangled heavily. I shivered at the sight of it, the only weapon in Red hands I’d seen all that day.

“Gary!’ Jenny cried. ‘How are things going?’

“Good. Very good in fact. The roads into the city have been cleared. The few troops that were around earlier have been dispersed. Seems they’re gathered around Dutton like drones around a queen bee!’

“Gary noticed me gazing at his gun. ‘Don’t worry about this, Angela. I sneaked into the city this morning with a few others. There are still counter-revolutionaries out there so we need to protect ourselves, but we won’t be using these unless we have to!’

“You seem to know a lot about what’s going on.’

“We got involved a few weeks ago. We’ve been helping to get this off the ground. Not like you, lounging around the house all day!’

“Like I said. Today is the big day! Firsthaven’s the only place still in Government hands. We’re finally going to kick those capitalist bastards right off our world!’

“Anything we can do to help?’ Clare asked. Gary bit his lip in thought.

“You could help with the paper selling, if you like. They’re a little rushed off their feet. But come and have a coffee first.’

“Casually we walked over towards the cafe, passing groups of workers discussing politics, or arguing over the best way to do their allotted tasks. Gary chattered enthusiastically; about his ‘secret’ journey into Firsthaven, the prospects for the Revolution expanding beyond Greyermede.

“Attention! Attention! An unscheduled train has just passed the three-kilometre

safety limit.’

“Gary cocked his head at the synthesised message. ‘Shit! They’re early.’

“‘What’s all that about? Who’s early?’ I asked. I followed as my companions hastily made their way to platform four.

“‘That’s the station’s monitoring computer. It’s still running to the old timetable,’ Gary explained on the way. ‘This train’s not scheduled on any computer’s timetable, so as far as it knows there’s a possible train crash about to happen.’

“People crowded onto platform four, but station workers kept many back, keeping the platform as clear as possible. Curious, I looked down the track, past the monorail pylons that disappeared into the distance. An eerie resonant noise whirred from the track above our heads, the air stank of burnt grease and ozone. In the distance a small dot appeared on the track and soon grew larger as it rattled on towards its destination.

“The dot became a train. Its bullet nose draped in the flag of the Revolution, a huge red fist punching its way into Firsthaven. The resonant whirring from the tracks grew louder as the train approached. The whistling rush of air from the train’s slipstream reached my ears as it hurtled along. Then its brakes screeched hideously as it began to slow, still a mile from the platform. Slowly it edged closer until it finally shuddered to a halt with a sharp hiss of compressed air.

“The train looked damaged. Bullet holes perforated some of the cabins and several windows had been put through. But that hadn’t dampened the enthusiasm of those on board. Hundreds of grinning, excited faces peered out from the windows. Men and women in civilian clothing mingled with militia uniforms, and all were armed.

“‘Gary, you old bastard!’ someone cried in joy. The man stepped down from the first cabin. Behind him the hordes of armed people were disembarking from the train.

“‘Rough trip?’ Gary asked the newcomer.

“‘So so,’ he replied. ‘We ran into a few counter-revolutionaries about thirty miles back. But we took care of them!’

“How are things in Trafalgar?”

“Great! We’re starting to put things back together again. I’d be there now, but we heard you lot needed some help! I always said people in the capital were soft.’

The two men laughed as they walked back into the concourse. We followed. I looked back and saw the ugly boxes of guns and bullets being unloaded from the train. A shiver of fear ran through my body. There was no going back; it wasn’t a game anymore, it was reality. The people of Firsthaven were being armed.”

Chapter 13

ABOUT an hour after the first train pulled into Firsthaven Station, a convoy of militia trucks broke through the M286 roadblock. The small detachment of troops scattered at our approach without so much as a shot being fired. Those trucks were loaded with determined bands of Red Guard. There was also a journalist hitching a ride.

As we reached the city centre the trucks slowed to a snail's pace. The streets were so crowded. The driver in the lead truck blasted at the crowds with the horn, impatiently cursing under his breath. The crowds broke to allow the trucks through, albeit slowly, to reform like a thick fluid at the rear of the convoy. Eventually the trucks reached the station and screeched to a grateful halt.

The militia and Red Guard climbed wearily out of the trucks. Stretching their tired limbs, they shouted greetings to comrades whom they hadn't seen for some time. Many were embracing like family, others chattering and laughing loudly, not caring who heard them. I detached myself from the group and looked around. What most concerned me then was finding somewhere to eat: I was starved and dehydrated from the journey.

"Is there a cafe around here?" I asked someone.

"Inside the station." I let the woman hurry away on whatever task she was there to do, and wandered over towards the station. I soon caught sight of the cafe through the teeming throng. Once inside, I ordered a coffee and a sandwich and sat down to enjoy the first food I'd had since early morning.

The cafe was full of people; I'd been lucky to get a seat. From the many conversations that were going on around me I caught fragments of the day's events so far. About the first train that had been shot at by Dutton's forces. How the counter-revolutionaries had been keeping out of the way. About a detachment of Red Guard and militia that had gone off to clear out what was left of the Terran military garrison outside the city.

Raised voices sounded from the main concourse. I looked out to see what the commotion was. Luggage trolleys were being used to carry boxes outside the station. The boxes were green and grey, stencilled with harsh white lettering.

Everything about them suggested a military purpose. I hastily drained the rest of my coffee and left the cafe.

Outside, there was an even greater commotion. Two trucks were parked in front of the building. As I stood and watched, the boxes were broken open to reveal guns and ammunition. Under the guidance of the militia the people were armed. A few at a time they approached the first truck, where they were handed one of a number of different firearms. From the next truck they were handed magazines for the type of weapon they carried.

The scene seemed one of confusion, but the affair proceeded orderly enough. There were thousands of volunteers, but the militia made a quick enough job of arming them all.

The sound of gunfire cut above the noise of the crowds. I nearly jumped out of my skin, but every one else seemed to ignore it. The source came from Wharfe Street, running alongside the station's main building, under the shadow of some warehouses. I walked up to investigate, and found myself observing a militia Sergeant as he showed some nervous looking volunteers how to use their guns.

Militia personnel were similarly engaged all over the area, hurriedly showing workers who had never held a gun before just how to use them. Military weapons are designed for simplicity of use, which was a good thing for the revolutionaries. They would never have been able to teach all the volunteers how to use them. Only those who felt especially unsure of the weapons were given hasty tuition, and even then the militia tutors were nearly overwhelmed.

I left the Sergeant to his lesson and returned to the station. The arming of the workers was still going on. A job that would take another couple of hours at least. There was not a lot for me to do. The waiting was dull, but I had to grit my teeth and put up with it. This was the worst part, waiting for the last stage of the seizure of power to take place. I'm sure many others felt the same way.

Yet how would Dutton and the Terran troops cornered around Commerce Square feel? If we felt bad then surely their feelings were a thousand-fold greater as they waited to fight their last stand.

IN the late afternoon, with the hot sun overhead, that last stand finally arrived. Jeeps roared along the streets towards the government buildings, passing the dead structures of Greyermede's financial institutions. Behind the jeeps marched

the Red Guard and the militia, their numbers swollen by the thousands of volunteers from the city.

The deep-throated roar of the military vehicles was drowned out in the cry of that great mass of people. The streets echoed to the sounds of the Internationale, sang with great emotion. At last Greyermede belonged to the workers. This last confrontation seemingly won already.

From the hindmost jeep leading the revolutionary army, I smiled as I watched a torrent of humanity pour through the streets. Looking around I saw other journalists. Camera crews raced alongside the road, trying to keep pace with the teeming masses. I waved and smiled as we drove by.

Fumbling with a camera I borrowed from Chris, I checked the memory card and snapped away. Up ahead, Amar Konate, leading the assault, sat in the first jeep, wondering where the Terrans were. They hadn't shown themselves for some time. The Law Courts went by. Abandoned and forlorn. The fortifications left in place but the soldiers and police had long since departed. The confident masses surged down the street, reaching the end they turned the corner into Hawthorne Lane, under the shadow of the great glass buildings that so dominated the city skyline.

A thrashing sound caught my attention. I looked about for the source of the noise, but could see nothing. Then someone grabbed my arm and pointed towards the sky. I looked up and saw a dot in the air, a bright light flashing from it. The dot quickly resolved into a police helicopter.

Flying low it soared down the street. I pointed my camera at the flying machine and adjusted the zoom. On either side of the airborne monster great bulbous radar domes were bolted in place. Its white skin gleamed in the sunlight as it headed forward with determined purpose, the visored visage of the pilot staring ahead grimly through the tinted windshield. The door on its side had been slid back. Strapped to a safety harness sat a Terran soldier adorned in a black flight-suit, over which he wore green-mottled battle-armor. His head was hidden in an eerily insectile flight-helmet, cables leading from the visor to the ugly form of a high-powered assault rifle crudely bolted onto the helicopter's body.

I pressed the shutter, but the viewfinder flashed the message, 'New Card'. I lowered the camera and struggled to replace the old memory card. The new one

slotted into place, enough memory for another thirty-six frames. I raised the camera for the shot, but at that moment the driver's head exploded. The sound of the shot followed in the bullet's wake as the jeep spun out of control and crashed to a halt on the roadside, its engine still revving madly.

The revolutionaries scattered as the soldier fired again. The bullet smashed a small crater in the tarmac and whined into space. The helicopter came closer, weeving to avoid the revolutionaries' counter-fire. The soldier fired again, his shots coming in random succession. Several more people were killed as the revolutionaries took cover.

Bullets bounced harmlessly off the helicopter's belly. Greyermede police helicopters were often used in riot-control and possessed armoured undersides. For those with higher-velocity weapons, the pilot's skilful manoeuvring defeated their often wild shooting. The noise of the gunfire went on for some time; the revolutionaries pinned down by that gleaming angel of death.

Shards of glass rained down onto the road, followed by an office chair. Guns opened fire in a hideous roar. Bullets peppered the helicopter's body and the gunman writhed as bullets tore through him.

With smoke pouring from its engine cowling and the body of the Terran dangling lifelessly from his safety harness, the helicopter veered away from the street at a steep angle. Unsteadily its injured pilot fought for control as it descended from the zenith of its arc, only to crash through the glass facade of a high office block. A great ball of flame erupted from the building as the chopper's fuel ignited, scattering glass and debris over the road. The gutted frame of the ruined helicopter remained embedded in the steel and glass structure, hanging like the desiccated remains of some obscene insect.

Several militiamen smiled coolly from second floor windows as the revolutionaries crawled out of whatever cover they had found. The way was clear. But the Terrans had several more helicopters at their disposal. Gunships too. Where were they?

THE advance got under way once more. I followed, on foot this time, as the revolutionaries turned into Haven Road and advanced on Commerce Square. Down the pleasant, tree-lined boulevard, the entrance to the square was visible. Barricades blocked the road and the guns of Terran troops flashed as they opened

fire on the advancing army.

The jeeps sped forward ahead of the militia and Red Guard. Mounted machine guns burst into life and the barricades were riddled with a deadly fire. Spouts of dust and smoke erupted in the air as the bullets blasted into stone and concrete. Several Terrans fell as the rest fled. Then an anti-tank rocket blasted a great hole in the defences and before the dust and smoke could settle the jeeps raced forward to penetrate Commerce Square.

The revolutionary masses surged triumphantly through the breach in the Terran defences. A flood of humanity swept past, pushing back everything in its path. That great flow was no place for me. I took cover in the shade of a bullet-scarred tree as shots continued to be exchanged. For ten minutes that great ocean of revolutionary fervour stormed by. At last it had cleared enough for me to follow.

The square was a battleground. The revolutionaries were beset by gunfire from the fortified structures of Colony House and the adjacent Board of Colonial Affairs. Windows not already put through by Terran soldiers shattered in the lead storm. From sandbagged positions soldiers and police unleashed a deadly fire on the revolutionaries.

A white vapour trail appeared in the air above my hiding place as a rocket blasted the fortified entrance to Colony House. Another explosion rolled over the square as a machine gun nest was destroyed, its luckless crew thrown through the air like broken dolls.

The guns fell silent. The crackling of flames and the moans of the injured suddenly audible. A great cry broke from the revolutionary ranks. Low at first, it built up in intensity until it was a dreadful roar. Breaking cover, the tide of humanity surged forward, guns firing once more, as they surrounded the government buildings and began to blast their way inside.

Colony House seemed to swallow the Red Guard and militia, a seemingly impossible number penetrated the buildings as the defence faltered. The shooting reduced in intensity until at last only occasional shots broke the deathly silence. From inside the building battle-stained figures emerged, their hands held high in surrender. The Terran troops and colonial police had at last given up their hopeless defence.

The revolutionary army waited outside the ruined building for fifteen minutes

while the government buildings were cleared. The prisoners were rounded up on the edge of the square and then left. To my astonishment, and certainly theirs', the revolutionaries no longer gave them heed. The defeated defenders were left to slink away or remain as they saw fit. It was for Dutton and his government cronies that the armed citizens of Greyermede waited.

From the smoke-filled gloom of its upper floor, two Red Guard appeared at the balcony. They draped a great piece of cloth over the parapet. Flapping in the breeze the flag of the Revolution, the Red Fist, at last hung over Commerce Square.

Smoke-blackened, looking weary, but smiling triumphantly, Amar Konate appeared at the balcony, waving to the crowds. Behind him appeared the smaller, older figure of Karl Minsky. Looking down at the crowds a moment, he turned his gaze on the smoking buildings that once housed the old colonial state. A smile stole across his face as he raised his arms to beckon for attention.

“It seems the Rats have fled! But no matter. Greyermede is ours. The Red Fist of the Revolution is poised to crush the capitalist tyrant forever!”

The crowds threw their arms in the air and cheered. Minsky declared Greyermede to be history's first worker's planet. The cheering and cries of joy rocked Commerce Square to its very foundations as the masses celebrated their victory. Around me grown men burst into tears of joy; rough workmen, their bodies ruined by a lifetime toiling in the colony's harsh factories wept and hugged each other like brothers or even lovers.

A grimy looking militiaman offered me a bottle of whiskey with a grin on his tired looking face. I took the bottle and swallowed a mouthful of the bitter fluid. The man laughed in pure joy as I returned it and then downed a great gulp himself. Hope, joy, great confidence crackled through the thousands gathered in the square. The whole city, the whole planet, was in celebration.

GREYERMEDE belonged to the workers now. It was no longer a world for the rich and powerful plutocrat. It was a world for the person in the street; old Joe Bloggs Nobody. But where in all this turbulent excitement was the deposed Governor Dutton?

Chapter 14

“A pleasant breeze shifted over the spaceport that day, bringing with it the sharp scent of the seas beyond the port’s distant perimeter,” Simon Niczyperowicz told me at a quiet pub one afternoon in downtown Mars Field. “I’m sure everyone was grateful for the breeze on such a hot day, but it was little consolation to the crowds gathered from all over the region.

“I was an air-traffic controller at Copernicus Spaceport. Refugees from all over the continent were waiting for the shuttles to take them to liners in orbit around Greyermede. Businessmen, politicians, bureaucrats in the state ministries, trade union bosses, all the stalwarts of the old regime, and many of their supporters huddled together in the departure lounges, waiting to be processed and transported to the distant shuttles five miles on the other side of the port.

“All incoming traffic had stopped by now. We knew that Firsthaven was falling. Nobody else could reach Copernicus. The air was laden with a dull fear. Could all these refugees be evacuated before the Reds arrived? Rumour said that revolutionary forces were little more than an hour away.

“Standing on an outbuilding beneath the airport’s control tower, I could see much of Copernicus spread out below. Behind me, the runways and hangars were hidden behind the bulk of the tower, but before me I could see the squat buildings of the rail and coach terminus. Here more refugees were billeted while the military processed their details. To my right the huge hotels stood empty and lifeless. To my left, down a great stretch of roadway, warehouses, and a variety of other buildings, I could see the shuttle bays. The shuttles themselves gleamed white in the sun, shimmering slightly in the haze. A microwave dish spun slowly on the roof of the Launch Control building, a dark silhouette in the distance.

“I looked across at the car-park. On the fifth story, slightly above my position, a tired-looking militiaman leant on the parapet. A cigarette dangled from his mouth as he looked down at the ground, lost in his dejected thoughts. A gunship flew overhead, its guns bristling with menace. A distant roar signalled the rise of one of the shuttles, taking its cargo into reluctant exile as its mighty engines struggled against Greyermede’s gravitational pull.

“The Terran troops had deployed their forces to defend the whole port. Hoping

to hold off the Reds until the last of the refugees was safely in orbit. Jeeps patrolled most of the perimeter, but the majority of their forces were concentrated on the main entrance. The car park was a fortress since it overlooked the likeliest point of attack. The nearer hotels held nervous troops and loyal militia.

“Below me jeeps hurried along the spaceport’s road network. Troops were drilled mercilessly or hurriedly transported military equipment to bolster the defences. Coaches transported frightened refugees to the distant shuttles and ultimately exile. From confident order, Greyermede’s elite had fallen into anarchy and chaos.

“AS I contemplated the hive of activity below me a distant shrieking noise broke over the sounds of the chaos. It quickly grew louder. I looked up, studying the skies. The noise didn’t sound like any engine I’d ever heard before. The car park across from where I stood suddenly shuddered as a great boom rolled across the port. Smoke and broken concrete erupted over the grounds as an explosion ripped through its structure; the shockwaves threw me to the floor even at that distance. The hideous wailing of an injured man emerged from the wreckage.

“The Terran troops burst into a frenzy of activity. Another shrieking wail broke through the skies. A truck roared around the corner of a warehouse and suddenly erupted in flames, the blast flipping it onto its side. The ramp leading into the car park suffered a direct hit and collapsed, crushing a jeep and several soldiers under shattered concrete. More shells landed in the port. The explosions shook the earth and the structures built upon it.

“Sirens whined and the troops ran to and fro. I fled back into the control tower, stumbling as more explosions rocked the building. ‘The Reds are coming!’ someone shouted as I raced up the steps, taking them in twos and threes, towards the control room.

“Crashing through the doors, I found the control room in turmoil. What civilian staff who hadn’t fled still manned their stations, operating radar terminals and communications equipment. Officers and soldiers barked orders, bustling each other to organise the resistance. The commander gazed out across the compound; his eyes fixed on the roads approaching Copernicus.

“Following his gaze, I watched as a great convoy steadily progressed towards

Copernicus. Jeeps, trucks, troop carriers, even a coach and several cars, all laden with revolutionary workers and militia. Beyond them, in the far distance, flashes of light briefly flared as militia artillery continued to bombard the defences.

“Little could be heard of the battle in that confused control room, but the distant roar of the cannon and the muffled chattering of small-arms as the two sides fought for control of the port’s entrances. I stood transfixed, ignored amidst the chaos of shouting, worried people. Held in awe by the sight of the proletariat on the march I walked towards the tinted windows and gazed at the battle raging below.

“From makeshift positions of defence, troops blasted the revolutionaries with heavy machine guns and assault rifles. Soldiers fell as bullets found their mark. Blood drenched the roads and the pavements. A jeep sped up to bolster the defending infantry. A mounted machine-gun roaring distantly. A hail of lead from some unseen assassin rattled the jeep, its occupants collapsing as the bullets penetrated light battle-armor. A squad of soldiers ran towards fresh positions, desperately seeking cover as a trail of dusty explosions ripped across the tarmac in front of them.

“Three dots appeared low in the horizon to the south-west. I watched them in an almost hypnotic trance as they silently flew closer. In minutes they resolved into three sleek metallic darts - the graceful lines of Militia Air Corps atmospheric fighters. Light flared under the wings of the lead craft and two vapour trails shot forth.

“Panic finally hit me. Almost hysterical with terror I ran towards the door and wrenched them open. Stumbling in my haste, I raced down the stairs. Halfway down, the building suddenly filled with bright light and heat. Some force picked me up as a terrible bang reverberated through the control tower and I was thrown down the stairs. I hit the bottom hard and blacked out, I didn’t remember anything else for some time.”

Chapter 15

“WHEN I woke, the smell of burning was thick. Smoke filled my throat and my eyes watered so I couldn’t see clearly. Fire crackled from above me and I guessed that the control room had been gutted in the explosion. I was lucky to be alive, but I ached all over and my head was bleeding. Vaguely I wondered if the fighting was over, but then an explosion rocked the building and I knew it wasn’t.

“Groggy from the fall, I stumbled down the stairs, almost falling all the way down but I managed to grab the handrail. Feeling numb with shock I limped down the stairs and slipped out of a maintenance access. Leaning against the wall, gasping for breath to clear my lungs of smoke I saw that the fighting had spread to the rest of the compound. The grounds below the control tower were a battlefield.

“Everywhere I looked there were running and fighting figures. Many uniformed Terran troops, laden with all their hi-tech battle-garb, many more in civilian clothes; grey suits, work clothes, jeans and casual jackets. Still more in militia uniforms, impossible to tell on whose side they were on if it wasn’t for the red bands of cloth adorning their arms.

“One thing was certain in this confusion of warring humanity, only the victors could be certain as the revolutionary tide swept the Terrans before them. The soldiers ran, pushed back towards the East Side of the port.

“Through this battlefield I crawled, desperately hunting for safety. My ears were assaulted by a dreadful symphony of chattering gunfire, the dull roar of explosions, and the screaming of the injured and the dying. Bullets whined through the air as they bounced off stone or metal. From the air came the distant thrashing of rotor blades as gunships fought to stem the flow of humanity overwhelming their comrades on the ground.

“At last I reached the warehouses across from the control tower, to the east of the ruined car-park. A squad of soldiers ran round the corner of the building, passing my cowering form. Their expressions were a mixture of fear and grim determination. Their equipment rattling in time to heavy footfalls. For some reason they ignored me. Perhaps they had seen I was unarmed and thus no threat.

“Gunfire chattered and several of the soldiers fell to the tarmac, one screamed hideously as blood poured from a wound in his leg. Revolutionaries stormed through the gaps between the warehouses and maintenance sheds. Battle raged around me once more.

“A gunship roared over head. The downdraft from its blades whipped up the dust and smoke in terrible choking eddies. Its guns roared, finding targets below. In the confusion the aerial beast killed Terrans as much as revolutionaries. It flew off towards the gates, its sleek shell glistening darkly in the sunlight. Suddenly it flared with a different light. Something destructive impacted and the sleek death-machine crashed to the ground in flames.

“From where I lay, panting for breath and bitterly scared, I could see the runways beyond the control tower. More gunships blazed on the ground. Several airliners also were on fire, their broken bodies jamming the runways. I crawled down the road between the warehouses. Glad to be clear of the fighting for that moment, but I knew it could catch up at any time.

“The next road beckoned and I leaned against the warehouse wall as I took in the scene. The vast tarmac plain, criss-crossed with roads and low buildings stretched out before me once more. Fighting figures filled that plain as the Terrans were swept up. Behind that raging battlefront the revolutionaries fought to mop up pockets of Terran resistance, while the rest battled to win ground. The Terrans fought dearly for every metre. Fighting even more viciously as they became ever more hard pressed. I was too frightened to wonder why they didn’t just flee or surrender instead of fighting on, allowing the casualties to increase.

“I watched as a gunship soared through the skies, black smoke trailing from its engine, its guns still blasting at the fighting figures below. Fire engulfed the insectoid killing machine as it exploded; no longer a sinister angel of death, it streaked across the sky like a blazing comet, its rotors still impotently thrashing at air that would no longer support its bulk. The gunship arced into the impounded imports building where it ended its mechanical life in a further brilliant explosion.

“My position by that wall was horribly exposed. Thankfully, better cover lay just a few feet away. With a quick, frightened glance around, I hobbled to the next warehouse and hid myself behind a number of crates that should have been stored in the building itself. Fortunately for me they hadn’t been moved by the

time the attack came. From this cover I cautiously looked out across the battle-scarred tarmac.

“Fifty metres away the main customs offices stood: deserted apart from some refugees billeted there earlier. In bewilderment, I watched as soldiers ceased their bitterly fought retreat and began to form defensive positions around the building. A truck appeared round the corner, parking with its cabin pointing east, its engine still revving impatiently. It seemed that the refugees were to be evacuated.

“Appearing low in the horizon, five dots rapidly flew towards the soldiers. They quickly became visible as helicopters, four gunships and one police transport.

“The gunships did not fire, and this seemed to add to the urgency of their flight. Great clouds of chaff scattered through the air in a defence against anti-aircraft weapons, and I felt sure their ECM11 systems would be blaring loudly on every electro-magnetic frequency used by military weaponry. The police helicopter hovered above the road and quickly touched down. The gunships hovered a little distance away, their weapons laying down covering fire.

From the police helicopter figures began to emerge. I recognised the hunched figure of ex-Governor Dutton, behind him toiled Dmitri Korolev, Micheal Hartmann and several more of the deposed executive. A blue-bereted officer met them and hastily saluted.

“Agents in civilian clothes gathered around to protect the deposed government as a distant crash came from the customs building. Struggling against a cordon of troops, the refugees fought to leave the planet. At last they overpowered the soldiers and surged towards the waiting vehicle.

“Dutton and his colleagues were hastily escorted to the waiting vehicle, surrounded by troops and CIS agents. As they were assisted into the truck a besuited agent raised a machine pistol and opened fire on the refugees.

“The truck burst into life and rumbled down the tarmac, urgently heading towards the shuttle bays. Behind it the soldiers and the CIS agents continued to fight as the revolutionaries surged forward. Holding off the tide until the truck was clear. At last only three remained; guns empty they threw down their weapons and raised their hands as revolutionaries overwhelmed the last resistance.

“Armed jeeps hurried after the truck in a desperate race to prevent the old regime’s escape. The vehicles disappeared in the distance. Only the distant sound of gunshots brought news of the race, and that was inconclusive.

“Minutes later, as a calm silence descended over Copernicus, a bright light flared beneath one of the shuttles. Mists of freezing cold air dispersed from its shell as it pushed its way from the surface. Slowly it gained altitude, the glare of its motors hiding the gleaming skin of the shuttle so that only a dart of bright flame could be seen.

THE shuttle roared into the sky, shooting spaceward. Aboard it fled the last colonial government of Greyermede. On the very wings of the revolutionary storm they fled into exile, finally safe from the reach of the avenging proletariat.

Chapter 16

BY nightfall Greyermede was wholly in the hands of the working class. The last pockets of Terran and Colonial resistance surrendered after the news of Dutton's flight spread across the world. By the morning of the 21st, it was all over. Peace descended on the troubled colony. The sun rose upon a world looking into the future with hope.

In the next few days the final clearing up was performed. Terran troops were imprisoned until arrangements could be made for their deportation. The militia units that remained loyal to the old regime were disarmed and soon released. As this was going on, other Red Guard and militia units rounded up the old government figures that failed to escape. Not all passed without incident. Thomas Franklin, the Terran Ambassador was found hanging from the gates of his official country residence. Simon McCrowley, the planet's now ex-Chief of Police and Minister for Public Order, was shot dead in counter-fire as his bodyguards opened fire on the militia sent to arrest him.

Other members of the old elite were killed also. But in the main they were taken into custody with little mishap. The killings were considered tragic but nobody lost any sleep over the deaths. Given half the chance their retribution against the Revolution would have been terrible. Besides, there was much else for the revolutionaries to consider.

At last Firsthaven took its place alongside its revolutionary comrades. From its workers' committees and party organisations that had so long been forced to operate in the shadows, a city council was elected. Both Amar Konate and James O'Brien were elected to this body.

The Terrans were defeated. Greyermede had finally achieved independence, though not in the form envisaged by the old Opposition Coalition: exploitation and poverty had no place in Greyermede's future. This future looked bright, but the revolutionaries had forgotten the terrorist organisations that had sprung up from the horror of 'Black October'. Not powerful enough to be a serious threat to the revolutionaries, they nevertheless made their presence known in a number of bombings and assassinations. Despite their lack of power, the terrorists managed to strike a terrible blow to the Revolution.

On the 27th December 2238 Karl Minsky was gunned down in a Firsthaven street. Black October later claimed responsibility.

Minsky had been on a walkabout tour of the city. Surrounded by Red Guards he hadn't wanted but was forced to tolerate by his party comrades, he undertook a tour of the city. Security was made nonsensical by the thousands of people eager to see him. Minsky hadn't helped by his own eagerness to mingle with them. Perhaps he could be forgiven this. With the Terrans gone there seemed to be no danger, only the great task of reconstruction. But Black October struck from the Opposition Coalition's grave and robbed the Revolution of one of its most popular figures.

A NEW DAWN

Chapter 17

MANY brave men and women gave their lives so that the Revolution could live. The people grieved at their passing, but took consolation from the fact that they were free. That those who perished sacrificed their lives for a better future. Yet, there was no such consolation for Minsky's death, gunned down, as he was, by enemies within.

Hurt by this needless loss, the colony mourned. It was a bitter reminder that all was not yet safe. Greyermede was won, but the Revolution was far from secure. It was surrounded by enemies and was forced to ponder the reactions of the rest of the galaxy.

Before anything else, the Revolution needed to bury those who fell to give it life.

THE streets of Firsthaven swelled with people once more. Thousands upon thousands turned out to say their last farewells to the fallen. In silence, they marched towards Commerce Square, their sombre faces written with anguish and grief. Leading this great funeral procession was Minsky himself. Laid to rest in a red casket, the coffin draped in the flag of the Revolution. Members of the party Central Committee and the Firsthaven Council bore Minsky towards his final resting-place. Behind them marched a detachment of Red Guard and militia.

Offworld camera crews followed the march. Never the subtlest of professions, the media nevertheless kept to the background for this mass outpouring of grief. The procession swarmed into Haven Street, at last heading for Commerce Square - a vastly different place to what it had been little more than a week ago.

As the funeral march passed into the square, thousands more gathered to line the outskirts. Discreetly placed camera crews calmly recorded the funeral. The great statue that once dominated the square was gone, a great pit excavated in its place. Already hundreds of red coffins lined its bottom, waiting to take their last comrade into their embrace.

Carefully the coffin bearers descended into the pit and there they placed Karl Minsky finally to rest amongst his comrades. The great procession that marched behind him gathered around the grave in a teeming circle of weeping people.

The leaders of the Revolution stood before the mass grave, their gaunt faces turned towards the crowd. Amar Konate looked long at the gathered people, tears streaming down his face as he prepared to speak.

“Karl Minsky was a revolutionary all his adult life!” he began, his voice cracked with emotion. “Never would he rest until Greyermede was free, until the proletariat ruled this world. Karl was taken from us too soon, before he could see the great things the proletariat will achieve. But he can at last rest in peace. The task to which he dedicated his life has at last been realised, for now the proletariat rules Greyermede.”

“Let our brave comrades lie here, at rest but not forgotten. Let their bones and the memory of their bravery be the foundation from which our hope will flourish into a great future!” James O’Brien cried. “Our memorial to them will be the new society we have started to build. They have bequeathed socialism to us, let us make sure they didn’t die in vain!”

Speaker after speaker addressed the crowd. At last, Amar Konate spoke up once more. “Let us remember those to whom we say goodbye. We owe them so much...”

Tears staining his face, his voice unsteady, Amar Konate began to read out a list of names. All those interred in the grave. Hundreds of names, a long list of the fallen but mercifully shorter than it might have been. The crowds wept as the names were read out. Wails and grief-ridden sobs erupting as family and friends heard particular names. In front of me the tears streamed down the rough face of an old worker, heedless of who saw them as he cried out his grief. I looked away, uncomfortable, feeling like a cold intruder at that moment.

The time for words was over. The square was quiet but for the sobs of the living. Slowly the mourners filed up to the grave to throw in a handful of earth onto the coffins below. Flowers, both single, and in bundles were thrown into the grave. No wreaths. Wreaths were for the dead; and while those in the grave had passed away, they still lived in the memories of those remaining, and in what would be built in the revolutionary aftermath.

After what seemed an age, the last of the mourners returned to the future that now held far greater promise than it did under old Greyermede.

That great outpouring of emotion was done. A funeral without priests. Without

the false, empty consolation of religion. Greyermede no longer needed religion, that prison of the freethinking mind. It was dissolved with the rest of the chains tying the workers to capitalism.

Behind the departing mourners, workers began to shovel earth into the grave, covering their lost ones forever, their faces sad but the tears now gone. The emotion had got to me. I had tried to be the cold, passive witness, but the Revolution got under my skin. Watching the funeral made me realise just how much. I walked up to the lip of that grave. Stooped to pick up a handful of earth and threw it into the pit. I watched in silence as it pattered onto the coffins below.

In the days after the funeral, the grave was planted with flowers and tended as a memorial to the revolutionary dead. In the centre of the garden they placed a great monument. On a block of white marble, engraved with the names of those interred, was placed a huge clenched fist; the symbol of the Revolution carved in red granite.

Chapter 18

SO much grief, but also so much hope. There was much to do and the revolutionaries' minds were turned from their loss. Now they concentrated on building the future free from the slavery of the capitalist.

One of the most urgent tasks facing the Revolution was the formation of the first workers' government. For weeks, the cities and regions functioned under the guidance of their elected city councils. Now it was time for these to be co-ordinated by a central authority. That was just what the revolutionary leaders had been negotiating for weeks, and now it was time to put it into practice.

At last, Greyermede elected its first government, independent from Earth finally. But it wasn't the government dreamed of by the old Opposition Coalition. It was the product of the workers' struggle, crystallising from their long labours. Nothing in the entire galaxy could be more democratic than this new proletarian government; the Directorate as they called it.

Regional and planetary government was modelled on the workers' councils of the cities and work places; it was to these, which the new government organisations answered. Delegates were elected to the new Directorate from all over the planet. The government was housed in Trafalgar by common consent: that city was ever the heart of the Revolution.

The steering committee - the delegates if you like - elected the executive. They had no greater power than their comrades did. Their role was merely to administer the various departments necessary to run the planet, and to guide the meetings of the new body. With Karl Minsky gone, the Directorate granted Howard Kramer the honour of being its first Chair.

The Directorate was no parliamentary body, nor were the delegates parliamentarians as they are in the Metropolitan Worlds. This was to be a working body, fusing the roles of executive and assembly. Ad hoc committees discussed and thrashed out specialist matters, but then put their findings and proposals to all the delegates. Once matters had been decided, the delegates themselves were involved in executing these decisions. They did not leave it simply to unelected career bureaucrats.

The old bureaucracies still lingered, of course. But where they couldn't be replaced, their obstructionist tendencies were countered with the metaphorical gun to the head. Attempts at sabotaging the new workers' state were not tolerated.

These delegates could be recalled at any time should they prove incapable of the tasks granted to them, or indeed, if they attempted to accrue power in their own hands. No hidden party caucuses existed to ratify their positions. No party mechanisms to protect their backs should they offend the workers. The majority party was the GCP and the great majority of the workers made up its ranks, not passively, but actively. The GCP's Central Committee was subject to democratic election too.

The Directorate handled the affairs that were too great for the regional and city councils to handle. The communications link simplified the ties holding the workers' state together. Authority rested on these workers' councils, and these bodies formed the backbone of workers power, based upon collective control of industry and agriculture.

All these elected delegates, and members of the city councils were paid no more than an average wage. All were held responsible to the workers. In the cities, the workers could participate in the decision making process, and many did in packed out meetings. For planetary government, this involvement had to be channelled through the delegates simply because of the distance of the government from most workers. But this government body belonged to the proletariat. It was their democratic institutions based on their own control of industry that now ruled the planet.

It was the dictatorship of the proletariat made flesh.

And what was this dictatorship? The opposite of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, of the capitalist. It was society ordered in the interests of the vast majority, not the profits of a tiny few. Class society inverted, but not negated. This was the proletariat oppressing the old ruling class. Denying them their old 'right' to exploit and oppress society. It would go on until all the old social rubbish of capitalism was finally weeded out, until there was no longer any social class, until such terminology was meaningless. Greyermede had entered the socialist phase, in transition to communism, the proletariat no longer a passive object of history, but cutting a new course to the future.

Chapter 19

THE new government supervised the rebuilding of the colony. Billions of eager hands took to the task of constructing socialism. In the general euphoria of those hope-filled days the government issued decree after decree. Greyermede's decades-old death penalty was abolished. Steps were taken to improve women's position in society, a position already greatly improved by the active role many women took in the Revolution. Nina Sanchez, Firsthaven's delegate to the Directorate, was placed in charge of women's affairs. Promptly abortion was fully legalised after decades of being a sensitive issue in Greyermede politics. Divorce was made available to either partner on demand.

Experiments in education were carried out, as the planet's educational system was opened up for all, involving massive schemes of adult education. Homophobia, sexism, racism were all old social ills that the new education reforms were intended to combat, alongside other efforts to eradicate these forms of social injustice. In the new liberated atmosphere, thousands of homosexual couples were able to marry for the first time free of any fears of persecution.

The proletariat worked hard in constructing their new order. They had only just begun the long task, but nobody doubted it would be completed. In the days following the election of the government, Greyermede's orbital facilities were taken into the hands of the workers. The last elements of loyalty to the old regime were returned to the planet or deported. At last, Greyermede was no longer cut off from the rest of the galaxy and messages greeting the workers of the industrialised worlds were transmitted to the stars.

Down below, on the now peaceful colony, the long task of regenerating the cities began. A massive house building programme started in Trafalgar. It quickly spread as the rest of the world followed the initiative. Hospital facilities were greatly expanded and improved, and made available to all. Trees and gardens were planted in the cities in an attempt to beautify their somewhat bland, cold architecture.

In amazement I looked on as the streets of Firsthaven sprouted statues and sculptures, forming new perches for the doves released in a symbolic gesture of peace. The works of art commissioned by the council from young artists and the art workshops that sprung up as workers minds' exploded in a great creative

impulse. The old, sanitised culture of the deposed ruling class was absorbed and regenerated in an explosion of proletarian culture. Worker controlled television stations, theatres, papers, publishing houses, cinema, all mushroomed in the wake of the Revolution.

Greyermede buzzed with life.

AS the weeks became months, the Directorate considered the likely reactions of the capitalist worlds. On this issue, the government was divided. Everybody felt they would face some kind of retribution from the outraged frightened worlds that had not yet fallen under the Red Tide, but what form that would take was unclear.

The GCP argued for the active extension of the Revolution, and assistance to workers beyond Greyermede. Others felt that this would provoke the capitalist worlds still further, and that the colony should try to weather the storm by itself. A consensus emerged that they would face only some form of economic sanction and possibly a blockade. It was also felt that soon other worlds would follow Greyermede's lead, ending the planet's isolation. Indeed, this was crucial to the survival of the Revolution, as the GCP leadership constantly told the planet.

That Earth would attack was a possibility they discounted. Earth was too far away. The Revolution would have triggered too much unrest, more revolts on other Terran-dominated worlds. In other words, Earth would be too over-stretched to launch an attack over such a distance.

As the Revolution debated the issue, it concentrated on building socialism. After all, events on the distant Metropolitan Worlds were beyond their control. They could only wait and see.

As to the capitalist worlds: had the Directorate possessed access to the Metropolitan Worlds' media they would have gained some insight into the minds of their enemies, but that was two weeks away...

THE METROPOLITAN WORLDS

Chapter 20

A dark, angry sky. Beneath it stretches a twisted barren plain. Ravaged by war, the buildings stand in defiance of the destructive forces wreaked upon them. No more than gutted shells, their windows and doors are smashed, girders and supports reaching into the sky like blackened skeletons. Here and there stand a few charred trees, little more than stumps. The plain disappears into the horizon, mud and rubble extending in all directions, and over all blows a cold, hard wind.

In the distance, figures appear, grey and splattered in mud. Hardly visible until they come closer, the figures are men. They are soldiers wearing dark, ragged uniforms. On their arms are dirty red rags. As they come nearer, they suddenly transform. No longer men, they have become something bestial, something hideous.

The view zooms in on one as it searches the wastes. It snarls viciously at the viewer. Its face like that of an animal: a pig-like snout, tusks protruding from a hideous mouth, the face covered in dark, coarse hair. It finds what it was searching for and stares at the nursery, already blazing, children running in mortal terror. A caricature of a grin spreads across its face.

Guns blaze, the hideous chatter roaring across the deathly landscape. Children scream, then fall, rendered pathetic, bloodstained heaps amidst the mud and the filth. The beasts emit cruel laughter. Then a child's laugh cuts through the hideous mirth.

The creatures stop, looking about in anger and hate. They see a young child, oblivious to the death and destruction about her. She sits on a patch of grass, an oasis in Hell. All around her are dolls and the girl sits talking to them, brushing the hair of one that sits upon her lap.

The creatures gather about her, their very presence causing the grass to wither and die. The girl looks up, her jade eyes wide with sudden terror. Her pretty pink dress is splattered with dark mud. The girl opens her mouth to scream as a cruel knife glistens in the weak light of the sun. A boot crushes a doll into the mud as they gather round her innocent, defenceless form.

Suddenly a creature falls, blood pouring from its open mouth. The rest flee, but

gunfire cuts them down in mid-stride. They fall into the mud to be sucked down into the hidden depths, like demons returning to the underworld. The clouds break and the sun shines down, its warming gaze restoring life to the ruined plain.

The little girl gazes up at a soldier and smiles. The newcomer's uniform is spotless. Beneath a blue beret, blond hair is visible. When the soldier looks down at the girl his blue eyes glisten in the light. Teeth revealed in a comforting smile shine whitely as the soldier stoops to lift the little girl. Together, the child and the soldier look across the reviving plain, to a point on the distant horizon. The view fades, and a new one comes into focus.

A pleasant park. Flowerbeds border a pond, which glistens brightly in the sun. A child sits with her mother, she laughs happily. Around them play other children and their laughter fills the park.

Suddenly the view zooms out. A great wall is revealed in the distance. Dark silhouettes patrol its ramparts while helicopters patrol the skies about it. The zoom pulls out further. Gradually the view of the walled garden pulls out into space. The fortified garden is Earth. Cradle of Humanity. Cradle of Civilisation. Spinning slowly in the blackness of solar space, it is protected in its innocence by the golden haired warriors, surrounded on all sides by enemies determined to lay it to waste.

From the darkness of space steps a man. He is smartly dressed in an expensive suit. Corporate in style, exuding authority. The man's face is white, his grey hair combed smoothly over a high forehead. Piercing grey eyes stare at the viewer as he smiles slightly. Benevolent, paternal, reassuring. The Corporate Patriarch, nay the Corporate Deity.

THE man is Emile Laurent. Leader of the Christian Democrat Coalition Party, and incumbent Terran President. The message in the earlier computer-graphic display was a much-used theme, but revolution on one of Earth's distant colonies added a new twist to the election broadcast. Now those hideous, bestial monsters were no longer shadowy, ill-defined enemies. They had been identified. They were communists. In Terran propaganda they reared up from obsolescence to destroy - and only to destroy. It was only this fortress, this ring of golden haired, gleaming toothed heroes that kept the enemies from ravaging the beautiful Eden that was Earth.

And it was the CDCP that was most committed to defence. The other parties, of course, were backsliders. Uncommitted to defence, and thus to the liberties that needed such defence. Vote for the CDCP and that garden of tranquillity would be preserved for all time.

AS news broke across the galaxy concerning Greyermede's fall, Earth was running up to an election. The parties seized upon the event as a weapon against their political opponents. Only the CDCP's mismanagement could have allowed such a thing to happen, it was said. While the CDCP claimed to be the only party resolute enough to handle matters of guarding democracy and liberty. As much as they feared the Revolution, they used it to suit their own ends. Candidates proclaimed ever more hysterically how their party would combat the Red Tide once they were in office.

The public relations companies and the ad-men working for the parties' campaign offices had a field day conjuring up ever more dramatic images of the threat posed by socialism. Cynical media manipulation designed to terrify the electorate into voting this way or that. The propaganda against the Revolution spiralled into increasingly hysterical imagery. In a fantastic phantasmagoria of untruth, the Revolution was the demon knocking at the door, the monster in the closet, waiting to leap out and devour Terran liberty.

IN the Revolution's wake, a storm of class struggle erupted through the Metropolitan Worlds. All this brought increased worry to the Terran Government, beset by problems: Attacks on its record in handling the economy, its short sighted social policies, and most damning, it had been in office when Greyermede fell. Why hadn't they foreseen this? Why hadn't they taken steps earlier? How could they have let this evil happen?

While the parties bickered over who should next govern Earth, others screamed for action. The Corporate Barons, fearing for their financial fiefdoms, bombarded Laurent's administration for action. Their property had been stolen under their very noses. The stock markets were falling and companies were losing billions. Why wasn't the Government doing anything? Why?

Daily the media poured forth more images of horror. Crying out in ever more vicious tones, the threat facing all that was democratic, all that was free, all that was sacred. They worded their diatribes in the language of universal humanity, when in fact they meant their capitalist paymasters. While some, less subtle

perhaps, cut through the mystifying veil of middle class politics. They went straight for the heart. If the workers will rebel, they said, then why should we not crush them? Are we not the masters? Shall we suffer to be questioned in our own house? And these commentators spoke the very thoughts of the capitalists, voicing what their paymasters would not dream of admitting, for fear of destroying the illusion of democracy.

[A] Red Tide is sweeping through our civilisation. Ignored it threatens to engulf us. This disease of communism is infecting the hearts and minds of billions, eating away at the foundations of our proud corporate citadels.

Yet, this is no utopian fancy. It lives in the heart and minds of these billions. This heart must be savagely cut out. There can be no question as to who rules the stars.

The Gauntlet of class war has been thrown down to us, and we would be fools to ignore the challenge. We must take up the Gauntlet. We must meet our ancient class enemies head on and crush them utterly.

If the socialists desire class war then we shall give them class war. War unending until the last perpetrator of this disease is destroyed. War without mercy. Without limit.

The Red Fist of the Revolution flies free over Greyermede. An affront to every civilised value. But we too have our fist. A brutal fist as befits these perilous times. A fist of deadly uranium. With this, our Uranium Fist, we can and we must smite the followers of the Red Fist.

This revolution must be drowned in blood. The blood of its creators spilled in great torrents until all the edifices of communism are flushed down the drain of history...¹²

NOT all the newspapers were quite so melodramatic, but one way or another they all screamed for the Revolution's blood. They all attacked the Government's seeming inaction. In the meantime, Laurent addressed the Earth, appeasing his detractors with smooth promises.

"Friends! Citizens of Earth!" Laurent said. "The enemy has struck. Thieves have stolen the colony of Greyermede from its rightful owners, and even now, they threaten the rest of civilisation with their darkness.

“I fear for the law-abiding people of that stricken colony. I grieve at the thought of what hardship, what terror they must be going through right now. I suffer with them, every injustice that these vile communists... these criminals, carry out against the innocent multitudes, but they are not forgotten.”

Laurent’s grave face stared at the cameras a while. His grey eyes catching the gleam of the lights. Behind his reassuring, sincere form stretched the metropolis of Paris, the lights of that great city shining like multi-coloured jewels on black velvet.

“Rest assured, our friends on that raped colony will be assisted. The Government of Earth shall not let them languish in their suffering a moment longer than they must. Nor will the screaming hordes of communists tear down the freedoms that, perhaps, we have taken too much for granted. We must be vigilant against these jealous, mindless wreckers. For of course they exist within, as well as without. We are under siege, but we shall weather the storm.

“My friends! I ask you to be calm, but vigilant. Together we can defeat this Red menace.”

AS the press screamed for blood, as the political parties continued their back stabbing and mud-slinging, as capitalism trembled on a cliff-edge, the Laurent government began to act. They acted in great swiftness, in fact, but as ever, they operated behind the scenes. To the planet’s population, Laurent seemed to fumble as civilisation tottered. There was no indecision of course. There had never been any decision to take. Laurent, and the corporations he represented, knew exactly what they must do. It was Laurent’s fait accompli, to be announced to world once it was underway. More than just a strike at the Revolution, it was a blow aimed at his political rivals.

Chapter 21

WHILE Earth's ruling class felt the chill winds of revolution, Mars regarded the news of Greyermede's fall in silence. The Martian Government was in something of a state of shock. In the days of the Opposition Coalition, they supported the colony's claims for independence. Such scorn they poured upon Earth; calling her the bastion of reaction and the enemy of democracy.

Greyermede was a means to continue a war of words against Earth, his major rival. Just another potential weakness to exploit. In so doing, they pumped aid to the opposition parties. Some companies, it is said, even provided assistance to the terrorist organisations. As for the Martian Intelligence Service, there is no doubt that they provided aid to these groups. In combating the terrorists, the revolutionaries discovered many caches of Martian-made weapons. Martian C36 plastic explosive killed Edward Wilton and plunged Greyermede into that ill-fated state of Martial Law.

The destruction of the Opposition Coalition and the victory of the revolutionary proletariat ended the power games between Earth and Mars. This was an entirely different scenario. An independent capitalist Greyermede posed no threat to Mars. It would be yet another world for them to dominate through their financial influence, another tool in their rivalry with Earth. A communist Greyermede was dangerous beyond their worst nightmares.

What if the Martian proletariat became too deeply infected with this disease, as they saw it? The Martian Government trembled as mightily as their Terran counterparts at that awful spectre. While the Revolution lived it would stand as a monument to their impending doom and inspire hope in the workers.

The determination to hold their territory forever had endangered the whole of the civilised galaxy. Because of Earth's shortsighted greed, the enemy of everything that was free, and just, and peace loving was poised to plunge the galaxy into a nightmare of totalitarian despotism. By Earth's failure to capitulate to reason, Greyermede gave birth to an unreasonable, virulent evil.

And thus interstellar capitalism trembled in fear.

BEHIND the accusations, Mars and Earth joined forces. The two pillars of

interstellar capitalism pooled their resources to crush a common enemy. And this they did in the name of democracy, of peace, and of freedom for all.

From across the widest reaches of the galaxy, Earth began to assemble its war machine. Weeks passed as they returned to the Central System. In orbit around Deimos, the great ships of war gathered. Battleships, carriers, destroyers, hospital ships, troop carriers, command ships, all met at Mars' main offworld military base.

A month it took to gather these instruments of mass destruction. Two weeks more to prepare. Then all was ready. In April 2239 the joint Terran/Martian fleet left orbit around Deimos and travelled out into the extra-solar deeps. Beyond Pluto's distant orbit, the fleet plunged into hyperspace.

Like tools of the Grim Reaper, these sleek, graceful vessels journeyed across the depths of space. Designed as though to cut through atmosphere, though not one was an atmospheric craft. Some warped aesthetic principle shaped their design. As though Death was somehow more easily achieved if the harbingers were pleasing to the eye.

Across the long light-years, Greyermede slept; unaware of the intensity of the hatred she had aroused

TERRAN ARMAGEDDON

Chapter 22

NEW Tokyo is the oldest and the greatest of Martian cities. Resting on the site of the first settler colony established two hundred years ago, it has become a teeming metropolis where every race, nationality and creed from neighbouring Earth has gathered. Constantly swollen by immigration, it is now the capital of a thriving republic, independent for nearly a hundred and fifty years.

The city is a strange jumble of architectural styles. Traditional Japanese¹³ architecture stands side by side with neo-classical designs; even a scaled-down gothic cathedral exists for the benefit of the city's Catholic population, but by far the most dominant is the typically bland architecture of corporate capitalism.

A taxi took me down East 98th Street. The road was bordered with luxurious trees, those genetically engineered breeds that thrive on the strange Martian light, and tolerate the ozone 'smog' from heavy traffic.

Unlike Mars Field, New Tokyo has a little character. It is more crowded for one thing, more cosmopolitan. Colonial cities are usually drab in design, but New Tokyo is old enough to have developed a degree of unpredictability. Its different building styles are a token of this: the city has outgrown the original bland layout of the planetary engineers.

AT last my taxi stopped on Hiroshima Boulevard, I paid the driver and stepped out into the crowded street. Pushing through, I made my way towards the New Tokyo Art Gallery. The great building was designed to resemble a Shinto temple. Inside, the air was much cooler, a pleasant relief from the stifling atmosphere outside. My footsteps creaked over the imported oak floor as I walked through the foyer.

I wandered into the main gallery, ignoring the strange sculptures that rested on the floor; bizarre shapes that looked like the mutated offspring of industrial machinery, or idealised statues of the early colonists.

Walking around the borders of a particularly ugly display; all bricks and beer cans and twisted copper wire, under the title 'Red Planet Dawning', I saw those I had come to meet. The two men were waiting for me at the far end of the gallery and I hastened to meet them.

Yousef Zabir looked up at a great mural that decorated the wall. It depicted a scene of the city's early construction. The image was a bizarre setting of two planetary engineers, dressed in smart suits, leaning over a rough trestle table that contained a layout design of the city. Compass, slide-rule and pencils littered the blueprint. Behind them a city was taking shape. An unformed dome rose to the skies, its uppermost edges rough and unfinished. Within the dome's structure stood the skeletal images of half-formed buildings. Smaller figures of spacesuited men toiled beneath them. Working with block and tackle, hammer and chisel. Not a single piece of modern construction machinery appeared anywhere in the picture. The artist had painted the impression of ancient builders constructing a modern domed city on the barren plains of Mars.

The image belied the reality in more than the technological anachronisms. No colonist built these cities, just hard pressed construction workers recruited from the poorest regions of Earth. The mural didn't tell the tale of the thousands who died to build the city. Or of the handful who made a fortune from the tendered construction contracts. It displayed hopeful colonists working together for the benefit of all mankind.

"Crap!" was Zabir's verdict, a view that would no doubt shock New Tokyo's art devotees.

Together we sat down on an imported-marble bench, positioned by an ornate bonsai display. Harper took out a cigarette and lit up, ignoring the no smoking sign on the wall just a few feet away. Shrouded in the cigarette smoke, Harper leaned back against the backrest, closed his eyes in thought, and began to speak.

Chapter 23

“IT was a quiet evening. There wasn’t much traffic. We’d been severed from the main shipping routes after we seized control of our world. A few rogue traders turned up occasionally, but mostly ships steered well clear of Greyermede. So, I wasn’t expecting anything other than a quiet shift.

“‘Supervisor?’

“‘Yes, what is it, Helen?’ I asked in between sips of coffee.

“‘There’s a ship approaching my sector and I can’t get any response.’

“I walked over to her terminal and glanced at the screen. A ship was slowly approaching Greyermede’s orbital traffic lanes, and its flight seemed a little erratic.

“‘Hmm, a Jovian registered freighter. What’s it doing here?’

“‘Shall I try to raise her again?’

“‘Yes. Keep trying.’

“‘Traffic Control to vessel victor tango niner stroke five eighty-six. Traffic Control to vessel victor tango niner stroke five eight six. Please respond and confirm. You are entering traffic lanes in contravention of shipping safety regulations. Please respond.’

“The only reply was a sharp burst of static. Helen tried again as the vessel entered the shipping lanes.

”...ermede Control... ede control, this is freighter Nomad, Jovian registration victor tango niner stro... ive eighty-six...’ the transmission was interrupted by a heavy burst of static. ‘...freak meteoroid collision. Have... s..tained heavy damage. Engine’s at half p.... Life support failing....’ An ear-grating burst of white noise cut off the transmission.

“‘Get the port director, tell him we’ve got a crippled ship coming. NOW!’

“Victor tango niner stroke five eighty-six... Message understood. You are cleared for an emergency dock. Please make for dock niner, zero-one-five degrees of your current position. Emergency services are on standby. Please confirm!’

“Static, then a garbled voice. ‘Negative.... Pilot systems malfunctioning. Can’t.. dev..te from current course.’

“Shit! That’s going to put them right on the surface!’

I grabbed for a phone to alert Gateway’s crash team. I was vaguely aware of Helen’s instructions as I shouted down the phone. Wiping my hand across my forehead I realised I was sweating.

“Understood victor tango niner. Your flight-path will take you over Gateway City. Crashdown on the far side, rescue crews will be there to meet you. Good luck!’

“The blip disappeared from the screen as it passed under the scope’s detectors. We were blind now. We couldn’t help any further. I jumped as I heard a loud buzzing. I was surprised to find I was trembling, but I’d never handled an emergency crash down before.

“Hello? Tom? It’s Steve, that crippled freighter —’

“What about it?’

“We’ve run the vessel through the insurance databank... VT9/586 was wrecked in a meteoroid collision two years ago!’

“Are you telling me we’ve got a ghostship?’

“I don’t know what we’ve got, but that ship isn’t what it claims to be!’

“But it squawked. We got the codes right off the scope! How could they be wrong?’

“I don’t care if it sang the Marseillaise through your speakers, that ship —”

I heard voices in the background. The phone fell silent for a few seconds until

the speaker returned.

“Tom? Our cripple’s in sight. She’s just come in over the horizon. It’s approaching damn fast and... Good God!”

“What is it? Steve? What’s happening up there?”

“Sweet Jesus!’ The sudden exclamation took me by surprise. Before I could speak a terrible grinding noise ripped through the tower. It was accompanied by an intense shuddering, like a powerful moonquake.

“Steve! Steve!’ There was no response from the other end. The line was completely dead. Then a cry of amazement from one of the monitoring staff caught my attention.

“Oh my God! Blips!’ he shouted. ‘Five, ten, fifteen... they’re filling the whole screen!’

“The heart-stopping sound of klaxons prevented further thought. ‘Everybody out!’ I cried above the awful noise. My crew didn’t need telling twice; pale-faced they rushed out of the room. I followed right behind them, no less frightened than they were. In all my time on Gateway the city had never been evacuated.

“Outside, the corridors were crowded with people. All the staff from the port control facilities jostled to get into the main complex and from there to the shuttle bays. I pushed my way through the people, going against the flow. Finally I grabbed hold of someone’s arm as they rushed for the stairs.

“Where’s the control room staff?’ I yelled over the noise.

“What?’

“WHERE’S THE CONTROL ROOM STAFF?’

“The emergency bulkheads are sealed. They’re all dead!’

“The news stunned me. I didn’t notice as the man pulled away from my grip and disappeared into the rush. The cripple must have hit the tower, but with the doors sealed what was the emergency?”

“Too many questions. And I didn’t have the answers. All I knew was the complex was being evacuated. My daughter would have been in the education block. My wife at work... no, it was her day off. She’d make her way to collect Emma, my daughter. I had to get them before heading for the shuttles. I rushed for the stairs, becoming part of that chaotic rush.

“OUT in the main administration block the rush was less. The corridors were wider, and most of the people had already made their way into the main complex. Gateway’s Red Guard and militia scoured the complex. One saw me and waved me towards the exits.

“‘Please, clear the complex!’ The man was wearing a pressure suit, his helmet dangling from a suit strap. I noticed he carried his gun in a ready position.

“‘Why are we being evacuated?’

“The militiaman looked troubled for a moment. ‘I’m sorry comrade; there’s no time for that now. You have to get to the shuttles!’

“Something occurred to me and I ran towards one of the windows looking over the city. The complex stretched beneath me; an oasis of regular shaped structures and gleaming domes surrounded by the barren greyness of the moon’s surface. I looked to the lunar wastes beyond. Nothing could have prepared me for what I saw. About a mile from the city’s perimeter, a ship was parked on the plain. And it wasn’t a freighter either. It was a Terran attack ship.

“My gaze went up to space. The bright crescent that was my homeworld looked so fragile in the darkness of space. I saw another bright point of light, a blossoming fire that burned brilliantly for a few seconds before fading to blackness. A fighter streaked across my field of vision like a shooting star.

Behind me the militiaman approached and placed his gloved hand on my shoulder. “‘Yes,’ he softly said, ‘the Terrans are here.’”

Chapter 24

“I was running through the complex again. Behind me, the militiaman struggled to keep up. I wondered if anyone else knew we were under attack. Then an explosion sounded from somewhere, followed by the sharp crack of gunfire and terrified screams. That was my answer. The Terrans were already in the complex.

“‘You can’t go that way!’ my companion cried.

“‘I’ve got to find my family!’

“I turned down into another corridor. The militiaman struggled to keep up, protesting all the way. A burst of gunfire and a blood-curdling scream echoed down the corridor. I stopped in fear as the militiaman raised his rifle. A squad of Red Guard appeared round the corner. Two dragged an injured comrade between them, their smoke-stained faces were full of terror.

“‘Get back!’ one of them yelled.

“Terran troops followed behind them. I cried out a warning as I saw them turn the corridor. Terror gripped my heart at the sight of their inhuman forms. These weren’t the troops that fought so hard on Greycorridor. These were Colonial Marines, Earth’s elite fighting force. They were dressed in grey and black mottled pressure suits. Battle armour covered their suits as did grey camouflage netting to break up the shape of their bodies. Their heads were encased in sleek helmets, features hidden behind black tinted visors.

“My cry alerted the Red Guard. Several turned around to give covering fire while the rest of us fled. Looking back, I saw one marine go down, the sinister visor no more than crazy fracture lines around a blood-rimmed hole. The marines returned fire, cutting the rearguard down. We escaped round the corner as the marines silently advanced.

“I ran down more corridors. Gunfire sounded from some of the junctions we passed. Several times I almost stumbled over bodies. I turned yet another corner. At the end of the passage, a scrabbling heap of people struggled to escape a squad of marines. Unarmed civilians pleaded and died as the marines mercilessly cut them down. Bullets slammed into the walls near me. We hastily retraced our

steps, but several more encounters with marines convinced us we were trapped.

“‘Make for the main dome!’

“‘We can’t! It’s against evacuation procedure!’

“‘Was the procedure devised for... for this?’

“The militiaman didn’t answer. He couldn’t really. We ran for the main dome, the centre of the whole complex. I ran into the dome without thinking, suddenly bereft of what little cover the corridors had offered. I cursed at my stupidity, but I was thankful that the dome wasn’t yet under attack. I started towards the corridor leading towards the accommodation blocks, but the militiaman stopped me.

“‘I can’t let you down there, I mean it!’ he yelled, almost hysterically. ‘It’s crawling with Terrans!’

“‘But my family, they’ll be in there!’

“‘You can’t reach them. You’ll be killed in minutes. If they’re still alive they can still reach the shuttles. How’s getting yourself killed going to help them?’

“I could see his logic, but I was frightened for them. I placed my hands on his arms to remove his grip from my shoulders. As I did so he was thrown against me. I felt something wet covering my shirt as he stared into my face, his mouth open, his eyes wide in shock. Blood dribbled from his mouth as he sank to the ground, his weight pulling me with him.

“Gunfire rattled through the dome as marines stormed in. I looked up and saw them streaming in through the corridor we had used only minutes before. I glanced down at my companion. He was dead. My shirt was drenched in the man’s blood. It occurred to me then that I didn’t know his name. Now I never would.

“Panic gripped me. Terrified people jostled me as I ran across the concourse. Dark figures merged with the crowd, killing as they ran. Something tripped me in my blind haste. I moaned in horror when I saw what I had fallen over: a corpse lay beneath me. One blue eye stared mournfully into my own. The other eye was gone, along with one whole side of the victim’s face. Nothing was left

but a gaping, blood-soaked hole. I fought to prevent myself from throwing up as the massacre continued above my head.

“The Red Guard and militia battled with the marines and several Terrans fell. But there were too many of them, I could see that. The defenders couldn’t stem the tide. Nor were they experienced in such combat. The Colonial Marines were renowned for their experience in low-gravity, zero-pressure assaults.

“As the battle raged, I crawled along the deck. Soon I risked climbing to my feet. A woman died in front of me, her chest erupting in a red shower as a bullet struck her in the back. With a soft moan she fell to the deck. The sight didn’t really register in my numbed brain. It was just one more horror in a world of horrors.

“The possibility of the dome being punctured dominated my mind. Just one stray bullet and we could have all died. Sucked out into vacuum. It made me quicken my pace towards the exit. Even so, exertion was beginning to tell. My breathing was heavy and my limbs felt like lead. A dull roaring sounded in my ears, partially drowning out the screams and the gunfire. I was grateful for that. I couldn’t stand the sounds of the terror, of the death that surrounded me. I just wanted to get out. To live.

“A militiaman fired on a squad of marines. Two went down, but another aimed his weapon and let off a burst. The militiaman twisted in agony as the bullets thudded into his body. His finger jerked on the trigger of his assault rifle and erratic shots whined through the air as he completed his twisting fall. Several bullets punctured the dome.

“Air began to trickle into space, then it gushed out as the pressure pushed out the shattered glass fragments around the bullet holes. My heart began to pound in a fresh rush of adrenaline and I raced madly for the door.

“‘Attention! Attention!’ proclaimed the calm tones of a synthesised voice, strangely cutting through the sounds of the carnage. ‘Persistent pressure loss in the main dome requires all personnel to evacuate the area immediately. There is a projected three-minute safety margin before the dome fails...’

“The computer got that wrong. With a loud boom, the ruptured panels blew out into space. A wind blew through the dome as the air-loss increased. The terrible howling drowned out all other noise as the air relentlessly vacated the dome. A

marine was sucked through the hole, his body slammed against the intact edges before being ejected into space, his broken body tossed like a rag doll. Others followed. The howling wind ripped at my hair, at my clothes. Loose debris blasted through the dome.

“Gunshots still continued to be exchanged as the survivors fought against the winds to reach the exits. Terran bullets killed many at the back as they struggled to escape. In a daze brought about by shock and fear I joined the crowds, fighting and struggling to get through the door. A thrill of desperate fear tickled my spine. I wasn’t going to make it. I wasn’t going to make it! I pushed forward all the harder, driving others before me. At last I was in the corridor. The air was noticeably thinner and I began to gasp for breath.

“I was never more grateful for anything when I heard the crash door slam into place behind me. Finally preventing the air’s escape, it also shut out the horrible sounds of the carnage left behind. Safe for the moment, I thought vaguely of my family. I hoped they had been able to reach the shuttles. But at that moment my own survival beckoned, I tried to block everything out of my mind, concentrating only on reaching the safety of the escape ships.

“Soon the comforting sight of those shuttles appeared; relief swept through my weary body. It wasn’t long before I was sat aboard one of those ships. Within minutes the vibrations of the shuttle’s great engines rumbled through the cabin and took us away from the horror.”

Chapter 25

“THE shuttle was filled with survivors huddling tightly in the passenger cabin, their minds and bodies succumbing to shock. Whimpering and crying were the only sounds. The noise of take-off had faded away to a dull rumble, more felt than heard.

A man sat next to me, his head scabbed with drying blood. Tears stained his cheeks as he rocked back and forth. His arms held a bloody bundle: a baby that caught a stray bullet. It was obviously dead. I looked away, remembering my own family. I didn't know what had become of them. I only hoped they had made it out of the city.

“The shuttle veered suddenly. The motion caused several people to moan in fear. I looked out of the porthole by my head. The shuttle was orbiting around Greyermede and the sun was coming into view over the planet's Eastern Hemisphere.

“The shuttle shifted to avoid the wreckage of some innocent freighter. The ruin tumbled in an unstable orbit, ravaged by fire fuelled by the ship's internal air. Part of a docking arm trailed from the vessel's hull. Beyond it the shattered wreckage of one of the orbital docks drifted. I saw another dock beyond that wreck. Small darting objects surrounded it. Brief flashes of light appeared as they fired on the orbital installation and explosions erupted from its hull.

“A freighter blasted off, its flight-path erratic as it struggled to leave the killing zone. Fighters pursued the freighter, firing mercilessly at its retreating bulk. A bright glare heralded its complete destruction. The wreckage tumbled away, like a dandelion clock scattered on the wind. Then it was lost in the blackness of space.

“The shuttle travelled further, preparing to take us into atmosphere where we would be safe from the reach of those vicious fighters. I tried to rest, to blot out the images of destruction from my mind, but they wouldn't leave me in peace. I couldn't forget the horrible screaming, the gunshots, and the terror of the dome depressurising. I closed my eyes, and then opened them. Better to see the terrified, bloodstained figures of those around me, than those horrible images of destruction that filled my head.

“The shuttle began to shake violently. I gripped the arms of my seat tightly, thinking we were hitting atmosphere. But then I caught a stroboscopic glare flickering in through the porthole. My eyes were drawn to the view outside. I stared wide-eyed in horror at the tiny points of light streaking past our vessel. The shuttle veered wildly and began to spin a desperate dance for survival.

“A fighter streaked past, its underside gleaming in the light of the sun. I saw it fade to a point of light only to turn once more and fly at our ship, its weapons blazing in a horrible fire. Closer, ever closer the fighter flew, until I thought it would hit the shuttle. Then it soared overhead. I didn’t know what was keeping us from destruction. The skill of our pilot, luck, maybe the Terran pilot was playing a terrible game with us. I didn’t know.

“The shuttle changed course suddenly, the movement taking me completely by surprise so that I knocked my head on the cabin wall. Blood oozed out of a gash and stained my shirt collar. I could see the fighter again as it moved in for the kill, or maybe it was another one. My heart began to race until I thought it would burst. I couldn’t take my eyes from the porthole as I saw Death coming for me. I wanted to scream but for some reason I couldn’t.

“At last I did scream as a terrible explosion rocked the shuttle. But I wasn’t dead. I wasn’t sucking vacuum, as the shuttle’s hull ripped open. As the glare faded, I saw a Customs patrol craft veering away from Greyermede, the wreckage of the Terran fighter drifted in its newfound orbit. Then the shuttle began to shake once more. But this time it was the honest shaking of turbulence. Of a shuttle entering atmosphere at a desperate, too-steep angle.

“We were safe. We were beyond the reach of those fighters.”

HARPER stopped as a tear trickled down his cheek. His cigarette had become a long cylinder of ash in between his fingers. I looked away a while, wondering if I should ask what was on my mind. Then I took a deep breath and asked.

“What happened to your family? Did they escape?”

Harper stared into space for a few moments. Then he flicked away the dead cigarette. I didn’t think he would reply, but then he quietly spoke up. Not looking at me, only at the floor beneath his booted feet, his voice was so quiet; I only just heard it.

“I never saw them again.”

Chapter 26

THE attack on Gateway City was designed to sever Greyermede from the rest of the colonised galaxy. Sixty seconds after the attack ship touched down a mile from the complex, waves of Terran fighters swept into the planet's orbital space. Their targets were the communication satellites that ringed the unsuspecting world. The intention was to destroy all intra-planetary communications, and effectively dismember the revolutionary body. Once the satellites were destroyed, the fighters turned their attention to creating as much carnage as possible. Orbital docks, freighters, passenger liners, the fleeing shuttles themselves were all destroyed under the weapons of the Terran pilots.

The fighters met a brave resistance from commandeered Customs patrol craft, and several were destroyed. Yet these lightly armed vessels could do little more than hinder the enemy. They were no match for the heavily armed TLA14 Vixens, or their experienced pilots. None survived the one-sided dogfight, though their actions certainly saved many of the refugees

The Colonial Marines also encountered brave resistance as they stormed the base. The small detachments of Red Guard and militia stationed in the complex were outnumbered, but they made Earth pay dearly for every section to be captured. The task was a hopeless one, and the militia fighters knew it. The resistance was intended solely to buy time for the city's inhabitants to escape.

It was fortunate that these men and women were present on Gateway. For the Terran assault was more than just an operation to retake a 'captured' installation. This was an act of retribution for those who sought to overthrow the chains of oppression. To this end, the marines unleashed a terrible wave of bloodshed, slaughtering man, woman and child as they surged through the base.

Had these men and women not been present to provide such a stiff resistance few people would have escaped the slaughter, and perhaps there would have been no witnesses to provide an account of the Gateway assault.

As it was only a thousand or so survivors managed to reach the surface of Greyermede. Nearly two thousand were killed, not including those victims aboard the orbiting ports and the wrecked vessels.

The revolutionary defenders steadily succumbed to Earth's military might. The final confrontation took place around the beleaguered Exchange, where interplanetary communications passed in and out. It was from here that a desperate message was continually broadcast to the stars. No coded, standardised transmission, but persistent pleas for help from the galaxy's proletariat. The message ended dramatically and ominously.

The last transmission from Greyermede, picked up by ships across the sector, was a short burst of gunfire.

GREYERMEDE was cut off from the rest of the galaxy. The Terran fleet controlled the world's orbital approaches. The planet lacked the sophisticated hardware needed to mount any serious defence. All its people could do was wait until the Terrans came within their reach. In other words the revolutionaries could do nothing until troops were landed on their world.

As the planet waited in ignorance, its people were to know a final fifteen minutes of peace. The time it took the fleet to assemble within striking range of the warships. At 02.13 hours standard time on the 18 April 2239, Ian Livingstone's 'uranium fist' was given substance. Two class X destroyers, the Endurance, and the aptly named Vengeance unleashed fifty nuclear warheads - multiple entry vehicles - averaging ten megatons each.

THE planet lay defenceless. This was a shining jewel in the darkness of space. An astronomical painting of continents and seas and whirling clouds shimmering in the light of its parent star. Its surface tinted with many colours. And like a delicate carving, it was terribly fragile.

Towards this tranquil celestial portrait, the dull-coloured angels of death aimed bright jets of fire as they streaked towards their target. In low orbit they swerved towards their assigned points of Armageddon and descended into atmosphere. Moments later the planet's dark side erupted in blinding light, and even the hemisphere illuminated by the sun flashed with an unearthly radiance.

Chapter 28

A thousand feet above Greyermede's surface the warheads unleashed their terrible destructive powers. In the first two seconds millions died; vaporised or incinerated to fragile ash and scattered on the fierce winds.

Miniature suns a mile across and burning at three million degrees seared the surface. In the immediate blast vicinity everything was reduced to its component atoms as the intense burst of heat vaporised steel, stone, glass, flesh and blood. Further out the heat, dissipated, but no less violent, ignited everything combustible. Fuel erupted in tanks. Gas mains exploded. Lakes and rivers boiled to nothing. Human beings screamed as their flesh ignited on the bones. Houses, office blocks, shops, men and women, all consumed in a raging conflagration.

In those fleeting seconds an eternity of pain and death swept the colony of Greyermede. For miles beyond the detonations, the destruction was total. Everything was scorched from the surface in the deadly heat.

More destruction followed in the wake of fire. Fierce winds swept the ruination as the shock-fronts followed in the aftermath of their creators. Buildings shattered in the intense pressure. Stone and concrete flew through the air, deadly missiles adding to the death and destruction. Fused and buckled office blocks exploded into lethal shards of glass. Even vehicles were thrown through the air in that awesome force, burning as they pursued their angry trajectory.

Above the destruction, the raging fireballs sucked up dust and ash from the ruination. Dragged from the surface by the terrible convection currents powered by the dying mini-suns, columns of dark filth leapt into the sky. Meeting with the incandescent furnaces they billowed into the dreadful form of a gigantic mushroom. An angry form brooding over the ravaged surface, a symbol of Earth's terrible wrath. As the fireballs finally consumed themselves, the mushroom clouds continued to convulse with ruined matter. Poisoning it. Irradiating it. Ready for its dispersal through the air. A cauldron holding lethal spores of lingering death.

"I was weeping in the darkness," Yousef Zabir began, "huddled up in a ball in the corner of some basement just crying my eyes out. I'd never known such terror as I did when the earthquake rocked the basement, when the walls cracked

and this terrible rumbling sound came from the world above. I clamped my hands over my ears but I couldn't shut it out. The noise and the quakes seemed to last for hours, but then it passed and I opened my eyes to the darkness.

“My mind wandered back to normality. It was only minutes ago, yet it felt like years. I'd got off the bus on my way to work and was walking towards the city centre. The streets were crowded with people. It was a warm day, bright skies, brilliant clouds, the kind of day where you'd rather just sit on the grass and soak up the sun.

“There were no sirens to herald the disaster. We didn't have any, we'd never needed any. Only the bells warned of the coming destruction. The bells of a multitude of different religions that still lingered. But we only heard them with a sense of curiosity, looking at each and shrugging, asking ourselves what was the occasion.

“Then the panic hit. The news of mass destruction surged through the crowd in a chain-reaction of horror. The source was probably radio broadcasts. Portable radios, car stereos, mobile phones whatever, the people learned that death was imminent and reacted as only they could - in mortal terror.

“Hundreds of people ran blindly, without direction, not knowing where to go. In the midst of this chaos I just watched, wondering what was going on but gnawed by an unformed fear.

“A man collided with me and knocked me to the pavement. We both fell entangled in one another's limbs. Before he could get away I grabbed hold of him and shouted at him to tell me what was happening. He struggled desperately. ‘Bombs!’ was all he said before he tore away from my grasp.

“Bombs! Oh my God! Oh my God! I kept saying repeatedly, like a mantra that would somehow prevent the Armageddon if I just said it often enough. I looked around, my body drenched in a sudden cold sweat. An empty office block towered above me. Without thinking I ran up the steps towards the doors and forced my way inside. I couldn't hear the screaming anymore, just the thumping of my own heart and the blood rushing through my ears.

“The world became a white glare as I toppled down the stairs to the basement. Lying secure in the bowels of the earth, I huddled up in a corner, my mind tortured with horrible images. I screamed, but I couldn't hear my own terror

above that roar.

“After that, a horrible silence. I just sat and stared into the darkness. I don’t know how long I sat like that. Time meant nothing in that black pit. I wondered vaguely if I was dead, that the blackness around me was some nether world. Foolish thoughts for a confirmed atheist, but I wasn’t exactly in a rational frame of mind.

“I knew I couldn’t stay down there. For one thing, I had to know that the basement hadn’t become my tomb. It was a sudden feeling of claustrophobia that urged me to get out into the open air again, even if that meant stepping out into Hell itself. Rubble partially blocked the stairwell making it a difficult climb but at last, I came out to what should have been the foyer. Now I stood in the open air.

“The light was too much to bear for some time. Eventually, when my eyes got used to the light, I looked around. What I saw sapped the strength from my knees. Great piles of rubble surrounded me, littered with twisted girders and shattered glass. Two columns from the building’s facade still stood, truncated but still recognisable. The remains of the glass front lay in a twisted heap before me. I realised that the blast had hit the building at the front, thrusting the shattered remains away from the entrance. If it hadn’t been for that, I would have been entombed alive in the bowels of the dead building.

“It took some time for my senses to fully digest the devastation. The ordered streets with their tall buildings were gone. Trees, lamp posts, and cars had all been picked up by the blast and scattered over the ruined plain. The road that had been so full of terrified people such a short time before was now littered with rubble. No trace of the road remained. Only the battered wrecks of cars and buses poked through the piles of concrete and dust. The buildings across from me were low mounds of rubble. There were no people. Not even the dead.

“In the distance I saw the remnants of an office block. The glass tower still gleamed in the diffused light. Inexplicably much of the building still stood, only its top floors sheared away. The rest of the tower was twisted and bent, the glass and steel fused and distorted in the heat. It looked as though the architect had taken a bad trip when he designed it. Beyond the tower rose a horrible sight; a huge billowing cloud of dust cascaded high into the air and dwarfed the ruined plain beneath it.

“Slowly visibility worsened. A warm breeze brought drifting clouds of dust, ash and smoke to veil the landscape. With it came the scent of cooked meat. The smell went to my stomach, stimulating pangs of hunger. That was too much for me; I threw up, because I knew that ‘cooked meat’ could only be human flesh: living breathing, feeling human beings baked alive within the ruins of their dying city. I wept again. A solitary survivor hidden by the rubble, burdened by such terrible feelings of loneliness.

” The city bore no relation to what I knew; I was lost in a barren desert. I left the ruin that had been my salvation and stumbled across the ravaged city. I didn’t know where I was going, or what I was looking for. My vague intention was to head for the outskirts of the city, though I no longer knew if I was going the right way. Every landmark that I knew had vanished into dust.

“In my wandering I came across no living thing. Yet, the dead were legion. Hundreds of corpses were gathered in twisted and broken heaps. Charred cadavers piled high against mounds of rubble, or against the remains of some intact structure. They were all swept into each other’s arms like leaves on a breeze.

“Sometimes I stumbled on individual corpses. Many were no more than charred husks, the carbon broken in places revealing red meat beneath the crisp shell. At one point, I found a body that still resembled something of the human form. It was charred, but the carbonisation had been perfect. The face looked up at me from its prone position; the expression on the face was still readable as one of intense fear. It was like seeing the ink on a written page when the flames have just consumed the paper.

“Later, while climbing a pile of rubble, I dislodged an old door. Beneath it was a body. I slipped and tumbled down the slope, the body falling with me. We landed at the bottom, the corpse on top of me, that horrible charred face only an inch from mine. I threw it away screaming hysterically. Even today, I wake up at nights seeing that face - and it asks why it had to die.

“After hours of roaming the waste, finding no living soul, I finally came across an uncovered entrance to the city’s underground system. Down in those depths, I finally came across other living beings.

“Dull emergency lighting cast deep, eerie shadows over the listless forms of the

survivors. Carefully descending the lifeless escalators, I made my way onto one of the platforms far below ground. Hundreds of people were gathered there for some safety. Isolated individuals like me, withdrawn into their own private worlds of horror and despair. I didn't see a single soul who had not suffered some kind of injury.

“The stench of blood and even burnt flesh and hair was strong. I turned my eyes away from the figure of a child, cradled in the arms of its mother. Boy or girl I couldn't say, its hair was frazzled to nothing, the skin a mass of ruptured blisters that glistened wetly in the light. The child's eyes stared into space. The mother herself was badly burned, as catatonic as the child.

“I stepped over the body of a man. Dead. The corpse glittered with glass fragments embedded deep within the flesh. How this unfortunate got there, I had no idea. Perhaps he crawled in agony into the depths, only to die of his terrible injuries, or helped by some lost comrade. All the same, it was a forlorn sight, this man who died so far from his loved ones, alone, in this forsaken crypt.

“Blood smeared the walls, and even the floor was slippery with it. More grim sights assaulted my senses, until I felt like Dante descending ever deeper through the levels of the underworld. But I would not find Judas at the very bottom. Only cold, manipulating corporate officials lay behind this inferno.

“At last I could go no further. I found a clear space by a wall and slumped to the ground. Surrounded by the damned, I tried to shut out their moans, their whimpering, and their pain. I knew then that we were finished. It filled me with such anger; I felt I would explode like one of those cursed bombs. There was nothing I could do. Not a damned thing.”¹⁵

Chapter 29

UNDER the brooding forms of the nuclear mushrooms, the Revolution perished. It died alongside the countless men, women and children that once formed its lifeblood. In the name of democracy, a great experiment in democracy was destroyed in the most bloodthirsty fashion, by the most awesome assemblage of military might ever seen.

Only a few cities were spared the horrible onslaught. Cities such as Firsthaven and Trafalgar where Earth planned to install its new servile minions. Otherwise, the destruction was terrible. The cities were flattened. Industrial estates were reduced to so much scrap. Agriculture was scorched from the surface. Millions of people perished in the flames of Terran wrath.

What escaped the nuclear attack was destroyed in the second orbital barrage. A conventional bombardment but just as destructive as the first. Under this more people died, surviving components of the planet's infrastructure were destroyed, and the final links holding the Revolution together were severed.

The fabric of the proletarian dictatorship had been torn asunder. The final threads would be destroyed almost at leisure. With the nuclear strike, the unified, central administration of the planet was brought to a conclusive end. The working class no longer reigned. Anarchy and chaos ruled over this once proud, hopeful world.

Only in Firsthaven and Trafalgar did any semblance of order remain. Here were the leaders of the Revolution, such as were left. Their commitment was undoubted, but there was no longer any Revolution in which to be committed. Nevertheless, they desperately sought to prepare for the coming invasion. What other choice did they have, even if it was to hold on to the fragments?

All over Greyermede, the people who worked so hard to build the Revolution cowered in their hiding places. Wounded, ravaged people sought shelter from the radiation, from the bombing. Defenceless against these sorts of attacks they watched helplessly as their New World was torn down around them.

LIKE a pack of hyenas, the fleet surrounding Greyermede closed in to tear the carrion of Greyermede apart. Scores of attack ships left the carriers. Orbiting the

ravaged world they descended into atmosphere and plunged groundwards.

The people were forced from their hiding places time after time. Flushed out by a rabid enemy, half-starved, weakened by injuries and radiation poisoning the remaining inhabitants were forced to defend their homes, to defend their world. What was left of it.

Yet, the Terrans encountered little in the way of determined resistance. The people were too weakened by their ordeals. They lacked the means to order the defence, or the weapons with which to resist. Any mass resistance was quickly crushed and dictatorship resumed where once there was freedom.

Across the colony, long-lived resistance fell to the old terrorist groups, or to small groups of isolated revolutionaries who still possessed the strength to organise and fight back.

The Terran counter-revolutionary force quickly spread throughout the devastated world. But around the Trafalgar/Firsthaven axis they found their stiffest resistance. Here they were at last put to a severe test. This last remnant of the revolutionary order was better equipped and better organised. Here the taste of Terran orbital destruction was less; here was the old heart of the Revolution, its most fervent defenders and its old leadership. They fought a most determined resistance.

The Terrans learned this to their cost when the attack ships first swarmed into the planet's atmosphere. The ships assigned to this sector met stiff resistance. Before even they poured forth their battalions of troops and armoured might, the revolutionaries attacked. No sooner had they touched down and the defenders' artillery rained a heavy bombardment on the ships.

The shelling was merciless, so intense even the armoured hulls were no defence from the explosions. In the vicious battle, the Terrans suffered their only real defeat in this intervention. So angered by the destruction already suffered, the hastily formed Red Army was barely controllable by the Revolution's besieged leadership. In any case, they failed to prevent the massacre of every Terran soldier that set foot on their territory. Perhaps they never really tried.

Even so, the inevitable was only postponed. As the days passed and the Terrans swarmed over the world, the Trafalgar/ Firsthaven axis was surrounded. With little food stores and dwindling strength, the territory left to the Revolution was

slowly nibbled away. Soon the battle was on the very borders of these cities themselves.

For the remaining revolutionaries there was nowhere left to run.

Chapter 30

“A salvo of shells blasted the streets nearby. I hugged the pile of rubble I was hiding behind. Fragments of stone and brick showered down. When the dust settled I saw a couple of my comrades sprawled in the rubble. The grief gnawed my heart, but only slightly. I’d seen too many friends die over the past few days. After a while, it numbs the feelings. Maybe later I’d have time for mourning the fallen.

“We were fighting for... for what? I didn’t know, any more. There was no longer any democracy. No socialism. It perished with the lives of millions of our comrades. I suppose we were fighting to spite Earth, because we couldn’t let them waltz in without a fight. We still hoped the Revolution would sweep across the galaxy and rescue us all at the last minute.

“Surrounded by broken houses, squatting amongst the dead and the dying, with shells falling by the minute, this seemed an impossible dream. I was just fighting to stay alive, and that was looking like an impossible dream too.

“Peering through the smoke and the dust, I strained to see the Terran troops. They were out there somewhere, slowly advancing. Scores of Red Army units had been flushed out already. Where the resistance was too stiff, or too well entrenched, they called up gunships to blast us out. We had been slowly giving ground all day.

“I looked down at my weapon, my trusty friend these past few days. The thing weighed heavily in my arms. I hated it. When we won our Revolution, I thought I would never need to touch a gun again.

“‘Dave!’ I turned to look in his direction. The radio transceiver was in his hand, offered towards me. Quickly I crawled over towards him, keeping low to avoid coming in sight of the infrared scopes of Terran snipers.

“‘Hallo?’ I said, then I remembered the normal mode of address for radio communication. ‘Fifty-first unit. Lieutenant Carter here. Receiving you. Over!’

“I listened to the garbled communication from the other end. Finally, I handed the transceiver back to my radio operator.

“‘We’re pulling out’ My expression gave away our orders - a mix of relief and shame. He nodded in acceptance. ‘Pass the word. We’ve got ten minutes before the artillery lays down a covering fire. They’ll be using the last of their ammunition, so we’ve only got one chance.’

“Leaning back and closing my eyes, I listened to the sharp crack of gunfire. From the distance, I heard the low boom of Terran artillery shells pounding the city. From some way off I heard the scream of a jet engine.

“At last, I heard what I was waiting for; a high-pitched shriek, gradually getting closer. Our covering fire.

“‘Let’s get out of here!’

Rising to my feet, I turned my gun down the street and opened fire blindly. I ran, the survivors of my detachment following and firing behind them as they retreated. I reached the junction with the next street and looked back. Dim figures began to emerge through the smoke, their weapons shuddering in their hands and spitting flame.

“A Terran went down, spinning in agony as bullets penetrated his battle armour, his rifle clattered soundlessly to the ground. More soldiers appeared from the broken shells of houses, advancing slowly, methodically. Then the shells struck and obliterated them from sight.

“The houses erupted in fragments of broken stone and brick. Huge splinters of wood went spinning through the air. A gunship appeared through the smoke, its guns blazing. A missile left its underside to blast a ruined house to rubble. Several of my fleeing comrades were shredded as they ran.

“The ground rocked as another salvo detonated. The gunship disappeared in the blast, only to reappear once more like an angry hornet. But this time it slumped to the ground and exploded.

“My jeep sped round the corner of an adjoining street, it stopped just long enough for me to leap aboard. Other vehicles appeared for my detachment - what remained of it. Then we left the battle and all our hopes behind.”

THE dull thud of artillery reached my ears. The windows rattled ominously. I sat in my hotel room, back in Firsthaven again, and tried to ignore the fear.

I only ventured out into the city a few times. It was too risky to tread the streets. Most of the battle was concentrated on the outskirts, but Colonial Airforce jets buzzed the city. They destroyed in an apparently random fashion, the pilots confident of their air superiority. The outdated anti-aircraft defences only managed to bring down a few of these swift harbingers of death.

The city centre was home now to thousands of refugees from the outskirts. People driven from their homes by the fighting. Shopping centres, hospitals and office-buildings formed their new havens. Even here, the tentacles of the Terran military machine reached out for them.

The Red Army was fighting a desperate battle to hold off the Terrans. Almost by the hour, they were succumbing. Firsthaven would not remain in the revolutionary hands much longer.

The war was hopeless, and I'm sure the revolutionaries knew it. But could they really give up without a fight? Rumours were filtering through from occupied territories of Reds being rounded up, of mass executions and a host of atrocities committed by the new regime that was forming.

THERE was movement in the streets below. Jeeps, trucks and other vehicles began to pass beneath the hotel. A great column of tired looking vehicles, occupied by tired looking men and women. Hundreds more passed on foot, carrying weapons and equipment of every description. The Red Army was on the move. Firsthaven was falling before my eyes.

Crowds of people gathered on the roadside, begging the army not to leave, not to abandon them to the Terrans. With shoulders slumped and backs bent they couldn't comfort those left behind. They were going to Trafalgar, to reinforce the resistance in that city. One last stand before the inevitable. Just as the colonial regime had done before them. And behind them, the terrified people just cried their grief, their fear.

I couldn't watch anymore. I left my room and wandered towards the lobby bar. I decided to get drunk and so try to shut out the terrible noise of the shelling that continued to ravage the city. The other offworld journalists were gathered in the bar. One or two chatted quietly in corners, but otherwise there wasn't much conversation. Too much fear filled the air.

With a bottle of whiskey in my hand I found a table in the corner and sat down. I

broke the seal, spun off the cap and took the first swig from the bottle. I screwed my face up at the harsh taste. I can't stand whiskey, but it ends sobriety in a satisfyingly quick manner.

After half an hour, I still wasn't drunk. I could feel the warmth of the liquor inside me, yet it was not having sufficient effect to shut my mind off from what was happening around me. I was too caught up in my own thoughts. Brooding too much on what was happening to really lay into the bottle. That's the only reason why I can remember the arrival of the Terran troops.

After a further ten minutes' wait, they burst into the bar. The soldiers stared at us for a while then they lowered their weapons. They were suited in protective clothing. Olive coloured NBC16 suits covered their regular battle-dress. With their faces hidden behind hideous respirator masks, they resembled huge man-shaped insects.

One of the soldiers pulled off his respirator to reveal a perspiring face. The skin was flushed red and glistened damply, while the man's piercing eyes examined the occupants of the bar. Then he spoke up in a calming, but authoritative voice.

"I'm Captain Faulkner, of the Terran Liberation Force. The city is now in the hands of the military," he said. "Is everyone all right?"

The journalists replied by crying out in joy, several rose unsteadily to their feet and embraced some of the soldiers. My colleagues behaved like rescued hostages, when not one had been held captive. The forces of 'law and order' had rescued the offworld media. Of course, they were all right... Now!

Chapter 31

WITH the fall of Firsthaven only Trafalgar remained to resist Terran domination. The counter-revolutionary forces were concentrated around that ravaged city, once the heart of the Revolution. Outside this battleground, war of a different nature was waged - counter-insurgency warfare.

Though the planet was all but conquered, there still remained isolated pockets of resistance, and the old terrorist organisations made sure the new Terran military junta could not relax for a minute.

THE offworld journalists threw themselves eagerly into sorting through the military press releases. They were particularly looking for sensationalist horror stories about the Revolution. They found plenty to feed the bigotry of the 'chattering classes' across the galaxy. Mass executions of loyalist militia. Torture of old government officials, and of course execution. The discovery of mass graves, labour camps, death camps, the works. I discovered one that caused particular amusement. The old Mayor of Trafalgar, Douglas Morant, was found hanging from a lamppost on the outskirts of the city with his throat cut.

I wrote him an obituary. He laughed when I handed it to him at the bar of this very hotel, though I wasn't around to see his reaction when he actually read it.

There were plenty of other reports that were most likely accurate. Stories of terrorist attacks on Terran patrols, bombings and ambushes. I found several alleging outbreaks of cannibalism. In the post-nuclear waste that now covered much of Greyermede, I found it easy to believe. Food in the city was subject to rationing, and tightly controlled by the military. So too was water. If this was the situation in the capital, then what was it like in the provinces?

There was no news of Trafalgar other than that the fighting continued. I suspected the Red Army had broken up, that only local factions and gangs were holding the troops at bay now. There were a few reports from refugees that indicated this. If it was true then the last remnant of the Revolution had been purged.

There were also rumours of Terran atrocities, though no press release made mention of these. I didn't expect they would. Plenty described routine

dispensation of 'justice'; trials before fair and unbiased military tribunals, humane executions, all reasonable and above board, but none of these reports covered the real human suffering. Every single one was cold and clinical, brushing over death and destruction with calculated corporate double-speak.

Yet, we now know something of what happened under Terran rule. This impartial treatment of captives was anything but. Prisoners taken in Gateway were flushed into space without pressure suits. In the Galena Valley tens of thousands of captives - Red Army and civilians - were rounded up and slaughtered in one mass execution. The bodies were dumped in a disused mine. In Firsthaven itself, people were disappearing without trace.

As all of these horror stories mounted, I began to wonder how long before the military came after me.

AFTERMATH

Chapter 32

IT was early May. The Revolution was crushed, but still Earth waged its bitter war against the people of Greyermede. The world was groaning under the heel of Martial Law. Not that of the old Colonial regime, but that of Earth itself. White hot and fresh in its contempt, and in its anger.

In every face the Terrans saw potential guilt. Behind every pair of Greyermede eyes they saw the glimmer of subversion. Fresh from the field of conquest Earth still feared and mistrusted its vanquished foe.

For the journalists in Firsthaven, many found their 'liberators' were now their captors. After enjoying great freedom of movement under the Directorate, we found ourselves subject to even greater restrictions than under the old Colonial Government. For days we would have nothing to do. Kept in virtual detention, we were anxious to be let off the leash. But that, of course, wasn't to be.

Many journalists accepted this virtual detention. Contenting themselves with sorting through press releases, they accepted fully the framework justifying the media restrictions. Occasionally a select few of our number would be allowed to cover some story outside the city. Flanked by military minders, and rapidly escorted to the story and back again in a transport helicopter, they were constantly hemmed in by a military authority eager to keep the lid on the real stories unfolding on this wretched colony.

It was frustrating. The press liaison office regarded my requests for access to stories coldly. I hated my captivity as intensely as I did under Dutton's old government. But here I was again: in the same room of the same hotel. Someone had a sense of humour. Black humour! A lot of people died since I was last here.

Of course, I knew why I was receiving the cold shoulder treatment. I was sympathetic to the Revolution. I covered it favourably - but fairly. By doing so, I earned the trust and the respect of the revolutionaries, and the distrust of the military. Now I was an undesirable, but the junta had no reason for kicking me off-planet - and they still felt they needed one. So I was careful not to provide any such excuse, but I knew eventually they would find some way to deport me. My days on Greyermede were numbered.

In the meantime I consoled myself with the usual dull routine of sorting through the press releases; thousands of bits of paper and computer readouts, swamping the journalists who tried to make sense of them. Occasionally I would wander through the shattered streets, trying to dig something up. Then there were the verbal battles with the officials, trying to persuade - or bribe - them to let me loose. Sometimes I just sat in the bar, spending more of my paper's money on drinks.

I was lonely. My photographer and friend, Chris, had been kicked off-planet. They found him photographing 'sensitive' military operations. What this meant I had no idea, but he was gone. For the other journalists, few would talk to me. I was the 'commie', an outsider and they were terrified of 'guilt by association'.

All my other associates - and friends - were involved in the Revolution. And they too were gone. Either dead, or in hiding.

ONE morning I was in the bar, the day getting down to its usual routine. It proved to be different as a commotion from the foyer disturbed us: a man shouting obscenities at the top of his voice. Several journalists wandered over to see what was going on and I followed, my curiosity aroused by the man's Terran accent.

A small, balding man was being dragged out of the hotel by two grim-faced military policemen. One of the press liaison officers followed the trio, while a porter carrying the man's luggage brought up the rear. The little man, whom I vaguely recognised as one of the journalists billeted in the hotel, continued to scream abuse at his manhandlers. They ignored him, dragged him outside, and roughly bundled him into a car.

David Sanderson of MNN was standing nearby. "What was all that about?" I asked. He turned and regarded me a little contemptuously. I could smell alcohol on his breath and he swayed unsteadily. He was drunk.

"They're deporting him."

"Deporting...? What on Earth for?"

"They caught him trying to elude his minders,"

"So?"

It was amazing how one word could completely throw him off track. It may have been the alcohol, but I suspect the question would have had that effect anyway. His brow wrinkled as he opened his mouth to reply, but then he failed to say anything. Stammering for a few seconds, he at last found his words.

“Look, the authorities give us these minders for our own protection. It’s crawling with bandits, terrorists and looters out there. If he’s going to disregard his own safety, and maybe that of others, then I think they’re right to kick him out.”

“Don’t you think it’s rather convenient that this protection gives them complete control of what we see and hear, let alone what their censors allow us to report?”

Sanderson looked irritated. Maybe I’d struck some journalistic sensibilities. “Of course they’re controlling access to stories. Unless they know what we’re doing, or where we are, how can they protect us? There is matter of security, which we must respect. It’s a matter of co-operation for the well-being of everyone concerned.”

“What about the well-being of the inhabitants?”

Sanderson opened his mouth to reply, but instead said nothing. With a sharp glare, he turned around and stomped off. I heard his raised voice ordering another drink as he returned to the bar.

I seethed inside, though I don’t know why I let Sanderson get to me. He was little different to most of the others, typical of the media would-be-celebrities. They accepted the security blanket that allowed who knew what atrocities to take place, because not to do so would have endangered ‘our boys’. And the people of Greyermede? Forget them. They weren’t worth considering.

Instead, the Sanderson-types preferred to be seen talking with the troops or mingling with the high-ups in charge. Good for their careers. You wouldn’t have seen them in the trouble spots, except to descend like vultures in the aftermath.

AFTER that brief exchange, I felt I had to get out of the hotel. The atmosphere was beginning to get me down; I was tired of the cold shoulder treatment. Outside, the sun was shining. It was the first time the city had seen good honest sunshine since before the bombs fell. Ever since, thick clouds had choked the skies. Dust and ash and smoke merged with the great vaporous clouds of water sucked into the air by the heat of the explosions. After a week’s heavy

downpour, those clouds had broken at last.

The rain and the brooding, angry clouds sapped the spirit from the survivors as surely as radiation sickness sapped their strength. Now the sun brought back a reviving brightness to life. The rain also brought one consolation; the radioactive fallout was mostly washed away.

The change in the weather brought crowds of people onto the streets. People were tired of cowering in the gloom, so they came out to enjoy the warmth of the sun. The large numbers had a visibly unnerving effect on the troops, but they kept their cool well enough.

The sun glinted off the glass-fronted towers that dominated the city's skyline. The sky with its collection of huge cumulo-nimbus clouds was reflected in the glass. It was a perfect inversion of the sky above, in all its fiery colours. The coloration reminded me of Mars. The sky glowed a dull pink, deeper closest to the sun. The cloud base was tinted a deep, angry red. The high, billowing forms of the clouds faded to pinks and bright, golden yellows. It was an angry sky, stained by the fine dust that still floated high in the stratosphere. It looked as though it was smouldering, ready to burst into a great inferno at any moment. There was a great barbaric beauty to that sky. A beauty sourced from so much ugliness.

The city seemed at peace. Deceptively so as the aftermath of war could not be ignored. Despite escaping much damage, Firsthaven still bore the scars of its ordeals. Terran shelling had damaged many buildings. Windows were broken or punctured by ugly bullet holes. Gashes and holes in the sides of buildings formed vulgar intrusions to the reflected image of the fiery sky. Many office blocks stood empty, looking forlorn and gloomy.

With fingers ready at the trigger, Terran troops watched the city's inhabitants as intensely as the inhabitants watched them. Both wary of the other. As for the people themselves, their faces were inscribed with suffering. Eyes were deep pools of torment and ruined hope. The people were fearful for the future; whereas only a few short weeks before, this world, and the future belonged to them. Now it had been snatched back by greedy, bloodstained fingers and all they could do was wait and see what their lot would be.

I wandered through the city streets for about an hour, just another face lost

amongst the anonymous, tremulous population. With an almost detached air I absorbed the sights around me; damaged buildings, patrolling troops, military vehicles rumbling along the roads, gunships flying overhead. Despite the slight relaxation in the tension brought about by the welcome change in the weather, I could still feel the intense agitation. I could almost taste the dull sense of fear and apprehension. I tried to remember the feel of the city when the Colonial Government fell, but I couldn't. That feeling was gone forever. Already the Revolution felt like a dream, and a nightmare had taken its place.

I was about to head back to the hotel when I remembered that I needed to get my press permits renewed. The permits were yet another way of controlling the media. About once every six days journalists had to apply to the resurrected Board of Colonial Affairs to have this renewed. No pass, no residence - you'd be on the next shuttle out damn quick. And, of course, the authorities could revoke these passes at a moment's notice.

Yet, we didn't complain. We couldn't. One word of opposition and our passes would be revoked. The authorities wouldn't mind losing our presence. It would be one less irritation for them. Without the offworld journalists to keep occupied, they could merely issued press releases to media agencies Earthside, without having to worry about some over-eager newshound trying to verify the contents, or inadvertently letting the truth slip through.

So it was with great reluctance that I headed off towards Haven Road. Commerce Square had changed since I was last there. True, the fortifications controlling access to the square had not been replaced, but Colony House and the adjacent government buildings had been re-fortified and hastily repaired. The statue marking the final resting-place of the Revolution's dead had been smashed to pieces. Fragments of the red granite littered the flowerbed.

I walked across the square, doing my best to ignore the desecration of what once witnessed so much heartfelt grief. The square was alive with keen-eyed Terran troops. The buildings fortified with sandbags and razor wire once more. My passport was checked thoroughly by a Terran guard before I was let into the Colonial Affairs building.

That building hadn't changed much. It still showed the damage from the fighting. Windows were boarded up instead of reglazed. Woodwork and furniture was still scarred by fire and bullet damage. Despite this, the building

was operating again. The bureaucratic machine of the old state had been resurrected and returned to its old home.

Getting the permit proved to be the usual bureaucratic farce. I was sent from one department to another before I had the forms signed and countersigned. But at last, I had my pass renewed. I was secure, well relatively secure, for the next six days.

ON the way back to the hotel, I encountered a patrol of Colonial troops gathered by the corner of Hawthorne Lane. I could hear them shouting and laughing at something, but I couldn't see beyond their closely gathered forms. Then, above the shouts and jeers, I heard the unmistakable cries of a small boy.

I was numb with shock when I finally saw what was happening. I watched in disbelief as a heavily built Sergeant punched the child in the face. The boy fell to the ground and the soldier kicked him savagely in the back. A wave of anger shook my body, I was sickened to see soldiers laughing and joking at this spectacle.

With a rush of blood to the head, I unthinkingly pushed through the soldiers and screamed at the Sergeant to stop. He did. I remember quite vividly the feeling of icy fear that rushed down my spine when his cold eyes locked onto mine. The Sergeant's face was set hard; there was a fierce gleam in his brown eyes. Behind me the other soldiers crowded in.

Desperately I looked around for help, but there was nobody else in sight. Then I noticed their commanding officer. I could tell by the blue beret folded under one epaulette that he was Terran. The young man slouched against a shopfront with an air of total indifference. Hastily I pushed past the Sergeant and kneeled down to help the boy. He was weeping and an ugly swelling closed one eye.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" I screamed in barely controlled rage. The officer continued to roll himself a cigarette, ignoring me completely until he had finished.

"This is martial law you snoop-nosed bitch!" he said contemptuously, in a North-American-Earth accent. "So why don't you fuck off?"

I helped the boy to his feet as the officer lit his roll-up, a cloud of smoke floated away on the breeze. Then the Terran looked at the boy and me coldly.

“Why pick on a child?”

The officer shrugged and took a drag on his cigarette. “The little bastard’s a looter.”

At that moment the boy cried out as the Sergeant pulled him from my grasp. “Get lost you whore!” he snarled.

“Get your hands off him you bastard!”

I was too angry to be frightened anymore. Foolishly, I reached for my inside pocket, for the credentials they contained. The movement was rather too quick for comfort, and I found myself staring down the muzzles of at least five high-velocity assault rifles. I backed away, my heart racing in panic. Slowly, very slowly, I removed my credentials and handed them to the officer under the distrustful glare of his men.

The officer studied my papers for a few moments. Then he looked me up and down, an expression of disgust evident on his face. “A reporter? Should’ve known. Who else would have been stupid enough to interfere?”

At his signal, the troops lowered their weapons. The boy was staring at the adults around him, his uninjured eye wide with fear.

“That’s right! And I happen to be well in with the junta, too, so I could have your ass for this!”

Lies. But I could see the flicker of worry in the man’s eyes. The Terran eyed me suspiciously, then he looked at my papers, and finally at the boy. My heart was beating rapidly, and my breaths were trying to come at once. I had to fight hard to control my fear.

“Mount UP!”

“Sir! What about the looter?”

The officer ground his cigarette in the floor with a brightly polished boot and looked down at the boy. “Screw him!”

The soldiers leapt aboard their jeeps. The engines roared into life and I watched

in relief as they disappeared down the road. The boy tore away from my grip and quickly took off in the opposite direction. "WAIT!" I cried after the boy, but he was gone.

If this was the sort of thing happening in the capital, what was going on outside? More than ever I was determined to get out of the city and see what was going on for myself. But just then I needed a stiff drink to settle my nerves.

Chapter 33

THE jeep hit a pothole at seventy miles an hour with a particularly bone-jarring shudder. The vehicle's suspension handled the jolt, unlike its three human occupants. I had confided my frustrations to Kate McKenzie and Sean Campbell, Kate a fellow Martian journalist, Sean a freelance from Lunar. Both shared my desire to leave the city and so, together, we 'borrowed' an army jeep and left the city.

There was something exciting about bucking authority, and escaping the city without official permission. At first it was touch and go. Sean displayed a certain flair for bypassing the computerised security system on the jeep's ignition. After that, we only needed to negotiate the military roadblock on the M286 exit.

It wasn't like before. I didn't have any passes bribed from the authorities this time, but bribery proved a useful lubricant yet again.

To leave the city cost the equivalent of two thousand Martian Yen, made up of a variety of Terran currencies; Japanese Yen, British Sterling, German Marks, and American Dollars. The money we scraped up between us from our meagre petty cash, and the Colonial troops guarding the city took it without a second thought.

Now the battered Firsthaven skyline was receding from view, swallowed up in perspective as we hurried along the motorway. This wasn't a repeat of my earlier journey to Teliote with Chris Harding. That journey was long and dull with nothing but rippling cereal crops for company and the occasional passing motorist. It was greatly different now; much more depressing for one thing and much more lonely.

I thought the destruction wreaked upon Firsthaven was shocking, but I had seen nothing in that city. For the first time I saw with my own eyes the terrible reality of Uranium Fist. Those cereal crops bordering the road to the north were gone. Kilometres of agricultural land lay burned and barren, the crops scorched from the earth. Not even charred stalks remained. For the first time, I could see the distant hills, enshrouded in grey mists; the blackened plain stretching out to meet them. Over the sound of the jeep's engine, the wind wailed for the damned. Clouds of black dust swept across the windscreen, only the wipers keeping the view clear. Spiralling eddies of ash whipped across the plain, moving like angry

ghosts over the ravaged landscape.

Sometimes we came across burnt-out vehicles. For the most part, they were agricultural machinery, but occasionally we saw the vehicles of the revolutionaries' last defence. At one point the jeep sped past the twisted remains of an aircraft. Too small to have been an airliner, it must have been a Militia Air Corps machine. We couldn't be positive though - the craft no longer had any visible markings.

The motorway itself had suffered its share of damage. The tarmac and concrete surface was cracked and broken by the convulsions from the bombardments. Craters and potholes pocked its surface. For the most part our jeep handled the ruined road, but sometimes the destruction was too much even for this tough machine. At these times we had to bypass the road and drive on the blackened plain beside it. Doing so was the most nerve-wracking of times. The great plume of ash thrown up by our tyres must have been visible to helicopter patrols for miles.

The damage wasn't the only thing that forced us to bypass the road at various intervals. Other, more grisly, obstacles choked the road. Cars and trucks were found in great numbers. Sometimes we came across these vehicles in solitary isolation. Burnt out and black. Metal bodies twisted where fuel tanks exploded. Many still contained the rotted remains of their drivers. Ghastly near-skeletons, the putrid flesh clinging to the bones like melted wax, they sat in their vehicles as though stuck in a traffic jam on the way to Hell.

Conversation ended. The sights we witnessed suppressed any desire for speech. We drove on in silence, until Sean asked for a cigarette. Without a word I placed one in his mouth and lit it for him. He grunted his thanks without taking his eyes off the road. I think he was glad of the need to concentrate on the treacherous route, but I doubt he could fully ignore the grisly sites. There was no such thing to take my mind off the destruction. I could only sit and watch the horror.

The sky gradually became darker as we travelled further from Firshaven, until we found ourselves immersed in an eerie twilight world. The sky was choked with rolling clouds of thick, black smoke. Slowly, the smoke thickened until at last it seemed we were driving through the night, yet our watches told us it was only two o'clock. In the gloom, we could now see little. The vehicle's headlights revealed more pockets of grisly death.

I glanced around, testing the extent of visibility. To the Southeast, I could see a dull red-orange glow on the horizon. The darkness seemed to be thicker there too. The barrage had ignited the OlMec Oilfields. The thick combustion products of burning crude blotted out the sun.

The journey to Teliote should have taken two hours. Instead, it took about five. The metal ruins blocking the road hindered our journey. The destruction was greater than our worst fears. We knew the devastation was terrible all over Greyermede, but we had no idea it was so great this close to the capital.

We failed to find any sign of life. In hope of finding survivors, we drove through the ruins of previously inhabited towns. Some were no more than ruined ghost towns, but others were littered with the silent dead. Rotted corpses lay in the rubble, eaten by maggots and oversized rats. No sign of life anywhere. The Terrans were too efficient.

Even more depressed and hopeless, we left these ruins behind. After a while the broken structures of Teliote appeared through the inky murk. We had little hope of finding anything but corpses here too.

Chapter 34

MORE nightmare images appeared in the jeep's headlights, but we were used to them by now. There was still no sign of the living as we penetrated deeper into the ruined city, yet every so often I caught sight of furtive movement on the edge of the light. Too dim to be seen clearly, yet bright enough to know that something was there. The brief blurs were little more than otherworldly; uncertain, but enough to raise my hackles, and my hopes.

The buildings were little more than burnt out shells, shattered under the impact of high explosives. The city looked nothing like its former self. Gone were the ordered streets. Gone were its landmarks that would have given me some idea of where we were. I was lost. This may as well have been my first trip to the city. In fact, I wish it had been my first visit, because then my mind wouldn't have superimposed images of the living city over the bones of its lifeless corpse.

Was it only a few short months since this city's inhabitants overthrew the government? Such a short time before that it was gripped by such dizzying euphoria? Now it seemed a millennium ago.

A huge department store loomed ahead. The structure stood open to the elements, its goods strewn over the rubble-choked streets. The remains of the building's plate-glass facade glittered in the headlights as Sean drove past the ruin, and the display mannequins watched us leave in eerie proxy for the dead. The road opened before us to reveal a wide pedestrian zone. This too was littered with rubble, but it was somewhat clearer than the rest of the city streets. Perhaps because of their very narrowness, the other streets concentrated the destruction.

The jeep drove past the ravaged structures of shopping arcades, fast food outlets, and the odd bar. In the centre of the square stood a small garden, shrubs and flowers squashed by blocks of concrete and twisted steel. Out of the garden a tree reared up into the darkness. Scorched in places it still held a few leaves, but these were black, coated in the soot that had blown over the city from the distant oilfields.

Beyond the square our jeep rumbled along a tree-lined boulevard. Bordered with once-fashionable stores, it was now a barren ruin. The shops were open to the elements, roofs and walls collapsed. Not a single window was intact, but mounds

of glass fragments could be seen piled against the walls, like great lumps of crushed ice. The trees survived the damage with little harm. Bark was charred, or scarred by flying debris and the leaves were stripped away, but still they stood in defiance of Terran malice.

At the end of the street, the row of buildings ended in a huge mound of rubble. Blocks of concrete and mortared bricks reared up in a slope against the neighbouring structure. Huge beams of splintered wood and twisted girders pointed skywards, like a tombstone. Beyond the mound, blocking off access to the next street we found a wide crater, filled with water from a broken main.

In the middle of the stagnant pool, the battered wreck of a gunship wallowed lifelessly. Its hull glistened in the headlights like the carapace of some primordial hunter-insect; its rotors buckled like the wings of a dying dragonfly. The thing was a testimony to the revolutionaries' defence, but even in death, the gunship brooded with a deadly menace. Sean span the jeep around the corner, the headlights swinging away from the gunship which was quickly reclaimed by the gloom. Soon it was lost to sight behind us, abandoned once more to its watery grave.

More destruction. The city seemed to frown down upon us. It was a chilling time. My companions' faces were bleached white in horror and I'm sure my face matched theirs. Everywhere we journeyed in that city we found more of the same. Ruination. Death. Hopelessness. The city was dead; we despaired of finding any living creature.

"STOP!" Kate yelled suddenly as we drove down yet another anonymous demolition site. Sean slammed the brakes down hard, and the jeep skidded to a halt with little regard for its human occupants.

"Jesus!" I exclaimed, startled. "What've we stopped for?"

"I saw something out there!"

"What? Where was it?" Sean asked hurriedly.

"It was a light, it was moving back there."

Kate pointed back the way the jeep had come. Muttering under his breath, Sean reversed the vehicle. He stopped about ten metres further back.

We stared into the gloom, but failed to see anything, just more rubble and ruined buildings. Then a brief flare of light appeared for a moment before disappearing behind a wall. I looked hard at the spot where the light had appeared but again I could see nothing.

“There!” Sean suddenly shouted, excitement in his voice. He turned the jeep around so that the headlights bathed the rubble-strewn buildings in a bright glare. Two figures were revealed in the light. Two women in long flowing dresses. One carried a burning torch, crudely made from a few rags and a length of wood. Both covered their faces to protect their eyes from the blinding glare. Before they thought of fleeing, we leapt out of the jeep and ran up towards them. These were the first living beings we had seen; we didn’t want to lose them.

As the three of us drew closer, I was able to get a better look at the pair. There was something wrong. Then I understood as they walked down to meet us. They weren’t women at all. They were men. The ‘dresses’ were the robes of Gaian monks, green, but stained with filth and ash. Both men’s heads were bare, except for a few days unshaven growth.

“We greet you Children of Gaia,” the first monk said in a monotone.

“Are we glad to see someone alive in this place,” Kate said, breaking into a grin.

“Are there any more survivors?” Sean asked.

The second monk stirred, as though he had awoken from a trance. His grey eyes stared at Sean before he replied. “We are the only survivors of our order,” he said, “there is no-one else.”

“Perhaps you should go on your way now,” the first monk suggested. “There is nothing for you here. Gaia has punished her wayward children.”

“What do you mean by that?” I asked. The monk looked surprised by my query.

“The Communists. They have been destroyed. They sought to take nourishment from the Mother, and so she sent her warriors to punish those who went against her. They are dying now, the hive is being purged!”

“You mean there are others left alive?” Sean asked in outrage. “Why didn’t you say so?”

“Yes, there are others. They have sought shelter in our temple. Defiling its holiness!”

“Where is it?”

The man pointed the torch in the direction of a building at the end of the street. It didn't look much like a typical Gaian temple, but then not much in the city looked as it should. Sean had had enough of this mad pair. So had I. We began to walk towards the indicated building.

“You cannot help them! You mustn't! Do you want to incur the wrath of Gaia? All this is the Mother's will!”

“No,” I replied quietly, sadly. “This is just the will of a few power-crazed politicians and businessmen.”

The first monk grabbed hold of Sean's arm and tried to keep him from approaching the temple. Sean pushed him off angrily. The monk fell to the ground and regarded us with a mixture of hatred and fear.

“You cannot interfere with Gaia's will!” the second monk cried after us. But his words were ignored. We left the mad pair behind, uttering curses and vulgar deprecations.

Fragments of stone and concrete crunched beneath our feet as we picked our way over the rubble. I pulled the jacket I had found in the jeep tighter around me to keep out the chill breeze as the temple loomed overhead. It was a dark, brooding form that seemed horribly lifeless. As we approached the door I heard a quiet whimper from within, and then I saw the faint flicker of a candle. Hopefully we passed through the door and into the main chamber.

“Good God!” Kate whispered. The chamber was poorly lit, flickering candles casting deep shadows over the chamber's furthest corners. Shadows danced madly with the breeze that filtered through breaches in the structure. We ignored the surviving icons of Gaian imagery. They were lost to us within the sphere of human suffering that spread out before us.

The temple was filled with people. Men, women and children lay in a haphazard manner over the cold stone floor, or rested on rows of crude wooden benches. The room was almost silent, except for a few groans and fearful whimpering.

The air stank of human blood and waste and decay. The human smells mixed in a sickening aroma with the odour of candle wax and damp.

Corpses at every stage of decay rested on the floor, so close to the living it was sickening. How could they stand it I asked myself? But looking at those unfortunates who still had life, I knew the awful torment had caused them to retreat from reality. They had no awareness of what went on around them. Shock had numbed their brains. Perhaps they were gripped in some terrible waking nightmare, a mental virtual reality in which they constantly relived the destruction of their city.

The range of injuries was frightening. Faces and bodies badly burned, a mass of grisly open blisters. Crushed limbs, gashes, broken bones, pulped flesh. Horrible to behold. Many were covered with makeshift bandages - torn and filthy cloth adding infection and disease to the list of suffering. I saw a man dully watching us, one side of his face was badly burned, an eye pulped to a crusty mush. Another rested by a pillar about five metres from where we stood, both legs gone above the knee, the stumps covered in stained and filthy rags. A body by the door, its stomach ripped open, exposing the entrails and crawling with bloated maggots.

Resting against the back of a bench, a young mother sat staring into space. I couldn't tell if she was dead or catatonic. Her ashen face stared at the wall opposite, no awareness registering in her eyes. In her limp arms a baby rested. Thin and shrunken, it wailed weakly for attention.

"Let's get out of here..." Kate whispered.

"No! We can't leave these poor bastards!" Sean said angrily. Kate looked away. The scene of human suffering too much for her.

"We can't help them, Sean," I said, gripping his arm and squeezing it slightly. "There's too many. They need professional help."

I started to drag Sean out of the building, trying to forget what I had seen. I felt so callous, so inhuman leaving these victims to their suffering, and to eventual death. There was nothing we could do. It was beyond our resources, I knew it. But it didn't ease my conscience one little bit.

The three of us made for the exit. Then we heard a sound from the door. A small

figure appeared. A young girl. Dressed in filthy jeans and a ragged T-shirt she stopped short and stared at us in fear. Her face was white, streaked with dirt, and her short blond hair was knotted with scabs of dry blood. Her small hands held a bulging shopping bag, stuffed with food and medicines looted from the city.

With a gasp of fear she dropped the bag and ran out of the door. “Don’t go!” Kate called. All of us raced for the door, eager to catch up with her. Outside I saw the girl running between ruined cars and up a pile of rubble. Sean raced after her, but stumbled and fell to the ground. He cursed as a sharp piece of metal drew blood. The girl disappeared into a ruined building. We had lost her, but Kate continued to shout.

“Forget it, she’s gone,” I said as I knelt down to look at Sean’s leg. There was a shallow gash and his jeans were stained crimson, but the wound looked worse than it actually was. I tied his handkerchief tightly around his leg; it helped to stop the bleeding.

Despite the wound, Sean was still able to walk, albeit with a painful limp. Kate returned from the foot of the rubble-heap and together we helped Sean back to the jeep. It took about ten minutes to get back, carefully picking our way over the rubble. At last, the jeep was in sight, illuminated in a bright sphere of light.

Something else was also visible. Standing in the light were three figures. Indistinct, they stood in silhouette. Feet apart. Unseen eyes watching us. One held an assault rifle, pointing in the air, the butt resting against the figure’s hip. Another held a machine pistol, resting it against a shoulder, finger loose on the trigger. The third allowed its weapon to dangle from a shoulder strap, hand lightly clasping the pistol grip. All three exuded deep menace. And all three regarded us in absolute silence.

Then a voice spoke from behind us, “Shoot them!”

Chapter 35

TWO more figures stood on the rubble-heap where we encountered the monks. One was short, but well built with long, greasy black hair reaching to his shoulders. An assault rifle dangled harmlessly from his shoulder, but the man regarded us with undisguised hatred.

“We should kill them,” he said, this time in more subordinate tones.

“No! We haven’t the ammunition to waste -”

“We don’t need to waste bullets!” The shorter man pulled out a butcher’s knife.

“Put that away! They’re not Terrans.”

The leader stepped down from the rubble-heap and into the light. He had dark, haunted-looking eyes that were set in a gaunt face. Despite that, they held a wary, intelligence, and what I hoped was a residue of humanity. An ugly red scar traced a line in his right cheek, forming a bald patch in his scruffy beard. He wore the filthy remains of a militia uniform. On his left arm was a red armband, so grimed it almost blended in with the drab colour of his jacket. A pistol was stuffed under a webbing belt, ammo pouches at his hips. As he walked towards us he slung his machine pistol over a shoulder and slipped his thumb under the strap.

“Welcome to Teliote,” he said. “My name’s Jimmy, and who might you be?”

None of us answered. We were too frightened. Huddled together pathetically between the menacing figures, we could only stare at Jimmy’s companion.

“Don’t mind my friend. He talks tough, but he’s harmless really. Now who are you?”

“My name’s Sean Campbell, that’s Kate McKenzie, and this is Sue Reid.”

Jimmy let out a short laugh. “See who you wanted to kill?” he shouted back to his friend on the rubble-heap. “None other than Suzanne Reid herself. A respected friend of the Revolution!”

The short man came down from the rubble, his expression had changed. “Sue Reid? Really? I read all your stuff in *The Worker*... before... before...” The man fell silent, his brow creased with the effort of recollection. Then he shook his head and turned despondently away.

“Follow us. You must join us at our camp. It’s not far,” Jimmy said.

The three figures guarding our jeep came up behind us. Two of them took hold of Sean and helped him up the rubble-heap. The third figure, a woman with a blistered scalp, brought up the rear. As I stumbled across the wastes, Jimmy came up to my side and placed his hand on my arm.

“It seems you’ve stirred a memory in my friend there,” he whispered in my ear.

“What do you mean?”

“He doesn’t know who is. He’s lucky in a way, he can’t remember what he’s lost. It tends to make him a little more aggressive, you know, the frustration of it.”

Jimmy looked away towards his friend for a moment, a wave of sadness sweeping his face. “I think he was a communist, before,” he added. “Sometimes, in his sleep, he utters things I’ve only ever heard from the GCP. I don’t understand it all. I was never a communist, but when the Revolution came we shot our officer and joined in. But my friend there, he knew all about it... once. He’s forgotten it all now, except in his nightmares...”

A dog howled mournfully in the distance. Jimmy led us through a maze of ruined streets and gutted buildings. We crept carefully around a creaking office block, its upper floors were blown away and one side had tumbled onto the road. Office furniture and sodden paper littered the street amongst the broken glass and masonry.

Our tattered escort led us through the dead city for twenty minutes before we came to their camp. The broken facade of a once high-class shopping mall appeared ahead. A hoarse voice greeted our escort.

“Jimmy! Brought us anything interesting?” The speaker appeared at a first floor window and waved. The woman was as filthy as her comrades. She too wore the remains of a militia uniform, the sleeves ripped out, revealing slender but grimy arms.

“We have guests! Journalists! Go tell the others we’re coming in.” With a mock salute the woman disappeared inside the building.

The mall’s doors were jammed open; the glass littered the marbled floor and scraped underfoot. We passed through in silence. The darkness suddenly retreated under the dull glow of crude torches placed around the building. In the centre of the concourse, a fire glowed a dull orange, casting deep shadows over the depths of the building.

Soon we caught sight of more men and women lounging about in corners, watching us with interest, or merely sitting by the fire talking quietly. I quickly counted thirty men and women, mostly young. Many wore a variety of civilian clothing, but several wore the remains of militia uniforms. One man wore Terran battle dress and body armour, a couple of bullet holes in the chest testified to the previous owner’s untimely end.

Places were made for us by the fire. The three of us sat down, glad for the warmth it offered. The air was unnaturally chilly outside. “Ishmael! We have an injured man here!” Jimmy shouted.

A thin man wearing cracked, gold-rimmed spectacles approached and kneeled down by Sean. The man began to examine the gash in Sean’s leg, ignoring his protests that it was nothing. With a knife he ripped Sean’s jeans and coolly studied the torn flesh.

“It’s not too bad,” he said, “looks worse than it is. Dirty though.” With that, he reached into a grubby bag and pulled out a bottle of disinfectant. Liberally pouring some over the wound, and then onto a cloth, he cleaned the ripped flesh. The gash bled again as Sean winced in pain.

“I could stitch it up for you, but I think it’s best that any infection is allowed to seep out. I’ll bandage it instead...”

Jimmy approached and sat down beside me. He stared into the fire awhile in thought. Nobody spoke a word; we were regarded with great curiosity by the filthy band around us. Our walk through the ruins had left us dirty, but compared to these people we looked like something fresh out of civilisation. In a way, I suppose we were. I think we must have sat in that uncomfortable silence for a good half-hour. At last, I had to break the silence. I asked Jimmy about other survivors.

“There are others,” he slowly replied, his voice quiet. “Even the Terrans can’t quite manage to kill off an entire city. There’s other bands of survivors roaming about, like us, taking what they can find to survive and dodging the Terran patrols. Most of the people have left though. I don’t know where they’ve gone. I gather it’s pretty much the same beyond Teliote.”

I nodded in confirmation, remembering the destruction we’d seen on our way to the city. “There’s only a few people left in the city now, mostly those who wouldn’t, or couldn’t leave. We tried to help the survivors at first, but we couldn’t do it. It’s all we can do to keep ourselves alive.”

He fell silent once more. The fire cracked and popped as sparks were carried up to the ceiling. Jimmy stared into the glowing embers, flickering shadows highlighting his gaunt face, giving him a sinister appearance. I wondered what he saw in the flames. Family, friends, comrades, the city itself consumed in fire?

Suddenly he was staring at me again. Anger tinged his eyes, even while his face held a hopeless expression. “Why?” he asked in a low voice. “Why did it happen? How could our comrades have let this happen to us?”

I looked away as a tear trickled down his cheek. I had no answer. I had no idea of the mistakes, the inexperience that led to the failure of the Revolution elsewhere. No knowledge of the betrayal by entrenched labour leaders who talked of socialism, but preferred the crumbs they received from selling out the working class. Individuals, who procrastinated, lied obstructed the Revolution in the name of socialism, allowing the capitalists to strike first. In so doing, they abandoned Greyermede to the rising storm.

The others in earshot said nothing. They merely looked sadly at the fire, avoiding each other’s eyes. I wanted to ask so much, but my questions died on my lips. In the face of so much destruction, did it all really matter? What was the quest of three offworld journalists worth now? Would the galaxy care to know about the suffering, wouldn’t it rather sweep away an embarrassing episode?

At last, Jimmy spoke up again, “Where were you headed?”

“Trafalgar. Any idea what it’s like there?”

Jimmy shook his head. “If I were you I’d go home right now,” he said, looking at the three of us in turn. “Go home to Mars, or wherever you come from, and

get the hell out of it. There's nothing left here now, nothing but memories. Take the good memories with you... remember the Revolution we built, but forget this..." he finished, sweeping his hand round to indicate the devastated city.

"We can't go home, Jimmy. People have to know what Earth has done here. We can't let them pretend this didn't happen."

Jimmy just shrugged, then laughed quietly, bitterly.

WITH his leg tended, Sean could walk unaided. Jimmy and his amnesiac friend escorted us back to our car. We walked in silence. No one felt like speaking. After a while we were back at our jeep. With one last warning to be careful of Terran patrols, the two men disappeared into the ruins. They were ragged ghosts returning to haunt the city. We were left alone again, surrounded by the dead streets. Already our discovery of survivors seemed unreal, and only death surrounded us as before.

In the glare of the jeep's headlights I looked down at the gift, Jimmy's friend had given me. It was a dog-eared copy of *The Worker*, dated 21 December 2238. The cover headline announced the triumphant proletarian victory.

Chapter 36

TELIOTE was far behind. We were on the road again, racing towards our final destination. Around and within Trafalgar, Terran forces were fighting to crush the last outpost of serious resistance.

Eventually, the oily clouds dispersed to reveal the sunlight of early evening. The sun was already close to the horizon. In the far distance, some reflective structure glinted red in the dying light.

The engine was a low buzz as the jeep cruised along the motorway, the monotone breaking every so often as the onboard electronics detected the need for a gear-change. Another ten miles on and the road cut through a ruined industrial estate. On either side, factories and warehouses stretched into the distance. All ruined; flattened by the orbital bombardment. Miles of tangled steel and shattered concrete. Warehouses were little more than skeletal arrangements of girders and scaffolding. Trucks were burnt out ruins in the remains of their loading bays. In the near distance, some kind of silo stood rusting. Isolated amidst the wreckage, its nearest intact neighbours were a couple of cooling towers on the very horizon.

The scene changed as we drove by the remains of a great oil-refinery. On either side, the motorway was bordered with a plain of tangled pipes and tanks. A forest of steel blown apart by high explosives and reduced to little more than a plain of tangled metal. Here and there a distillation column still stood, pipes and conduits severed from the rest of the plant. Storage tanks lay ruptured, surrounded by pools of unburned oil, steel coated in thick soot from the burning. Pipes as thick as our jeep still straddled the motorway, linking the two halves of the ruined refinery.

In places, the ruin still smouldered. Plumes of smoke drifted on the wind. Tiny cousins to the thick cloud that dominated the distant horizon where the oil fields blazed. The whole place was a smoking memorial to Greyermede's petrochemicals industry.

THE ruined industrial estate quickly sped past. Soon the broken structures of Trafalgar reared up on the horizon. A cluster of ravaged towers reached into the sky. A haze of dust and smoke shrouded the city. As we left the motorway,

ruined streets surrounded us once more. Houses and shops pummelled into rubble. A ruin forged by the hammer blows of Terran artillery.

That artillery could be heard above the noise of the engine. Dull explosions from the heart of Trafalgar, plumes of smoke and dust marked the target's destruction. Points on the horizon glowed orange in the dull light of dusk, as fires raged in the city. In the distance small dots hovered in the air. They could only have been gunships rooting out pockets of resistance. We were at the very edge of the war-zone.

THERE is little more to tell of the events on Greyermede. We had finally reached our destination, but not our ultimate objective. The destruction was far greater than we anticipated. The carnage and confusion left us unsure of the next step. We had no idea of how to make contact with the rebels still holding out, or how to avoid the military.

Surrounded by those wind-swept ruins we stopped. I killed the engine allowing silence to fall upon those ravaged streets. Kate, Sean and I climbed out of the jeep to stretch our legs, and to get a better view of the war-torn structures dominating the skyline. The distant sounds of battle reached my ears as the sunlight glinted red from the glass facades of the more intact of Trafalgar's buildings. A breeze brought the faint scent of burning and gunsmoke.

Then I caught the sound of rotors. The sound grew louder as a gunship became visible from the ruins. The grim looking machine steadily closed in on us, until at last it began to land twenty metres away from us. Terran troops, the mercenaries of a hate-filled ruling class, leapt out and advanced on us, weapons at the ready. This was the end. We could not escape the Terran patrol.

The troops disturbed something as they marched towards us. A bird flapped madly from behind a block of broken concrete. My eyes followed it as best they could until it alighted on the charred branch of a defoliated tree. It was a dove, one of many released by the revolutionaries as a symbol of socialist peace. Somehow seeing that creature, alive amongst so much death, raised my hopes.

I knew then, they couldn't conquer forever. The gravediggers will gather again. And next time they'll be here for the capitalists.

Sue Reid17,

Mars, July 2249

“You ignorant stooges! Your ‘order’ is built upon sand. Tomorrow the revolution will rise again clashing its weapons and terrify you with the clarion call: I was, I am, I shall be.”

Rosa Luxemburg

BIOGRAPHIES

BENTHAM, DOMINIC (2194 -): Leader of the Liberal Party and one of the original negotiating team who formulated the Opposition Coalition. Bentham was a director in the Central Bank and a close friend of Edward Wilton.

CARTER, DAVID (2208 -): A monorail operator on Greyermede’s transport network. Became involved in the political turmoil and joined the GCP. He later fought for the Revolution as a member of the Red Guard and later as a Lieutenant in the Red Army.

COHEN, ALAN (2212 -): A militiaman at the time of the Revolution. Stationed in Trafalgar’s Holton Barracks. After refusing to fire on the people, the militia elected Cohen to its Militia Revolutionary Committee.

DUTTON, JOHN (2183 -): Terran-born Governor of Greyermede from 2130 - 2138, 2139 - 2140. Overthrown as a result of the Revolution. The counter-revolutionary military government later restored him in a provisional capacity.

FRANKLIN, THOMAS (2175 - 2238): Terran ambassador to Greyermede from 2225 - 2238.

HARPER, THOMAS (2200 -): A supervisor in Gateway City traffic control. The first counter-revolutionary assault came during his shift. His family was killed during this attack.

HUSSAIN, AHMED (2213 - 2239): Chair of the Holton Militia Revolutionary Committee. He died fighting the counter-revolutionaries.

KOROLEV, DMITRI (2191 -): President of the Central Bank from 2235 to 2238. He succeeded Edward Wilton as Finance Minister in 2238, following Wilton’s assassination.

KRAMER, HOWARD (2196 - 2239): Member of the GCP central committee. Elected President of the Directorate. Killed during the counter-revolution.

KONATE, AMAR (2205 -): Member of the Firsthaven workers' council. Led the assault on Colony House. Later appointed second in command of the Red Army.

LAURENT, EMILE (2176 -): Terran President and leader of the Christian Democratic Coalition Party. Served two terms, and won a third as a result of Operation Uranium Fist.

LIVINGSTONE, IAN (2174 - 2247): Editor of the Times (Earth) from 2230 until his retirement in 2240.

MANJANI, STEPHAN (2208 -): Member of the GCP, deputy chair of Trafalgar workers' council.

McCROWLEY, SIMON (2190 - 2238): Chief of police prior to the Revolution. Killed when his bodyguards opened fire on the revolutionaries sent to arrest him.

MINSKY, KARL (2188 - 2238): Chair of the GCP central committee. Hailed as the leader of the Revolution. Assassinated several days after the fall of Dutton's Colonial Government. The Black October activist was never caught.

NICZYPEROWICZ, SIMON (2198 -): An Air-Traffic Controller at Copernicus Spaceport's air terminal. Did not support the Revolution, and fled the world soon after the fall of the Colonial Government.

NKRUMA, OMAR (2211 -): A redundant oil-worker at the time of the Revolution. Joined the Workers' Democratic Front. Later climbed the ranks of the Trans-World Oil Workers' Union.

O'BRIEN, JAMES (2190 -): A member of the GCP central committee. Came out of hiding with Minsky. Elected to the Firsthaven council, and then the Directorate. Later appointed head of the Red Army. He led the assault on Copernicus Spaceport.

SANCHEZ, NINA (2207 -): A leading member of the GCP. Elected to the Firsthaven council. Later chosen to be the city's delegate to the Directorate. Sanchez was active in women's affairs.

SAUNDERS, ANGELA (2209 -): A secretary at the Terran Oil Federation's main branch office in Firsthaven.

SENAI, AHMED (2210 - 2239): Member of the GCP and chair of the Galena Valley Council. Killed during the nuclear strike along with the rest of the city's revolutionary leaders.

SPENCER, CAROLINE (2221 - 2243): The Black October activist who shot Karl Minsky dead. She was smuggled off planet in the wake of the assassination. Later, she was recruited into the Martian secret services and was killed while on a mission.

STEADMAN, MAXWELL (2185 -): An indigenous industrialist, one of the few able to compete on an equal basis with offworld capital. One of the founder members of the Independence Party, tipped as a candidate for Presidency by the Opposition Coalition. Fled to Earth with much of his wealth before the fall of the Colonial Government.

WADE, GENERAL, Sir ANDREW (2180 -): Commander-In-Chief of the Terran/Martian counter-revolutionary force.

WILTON, EDWARD (2178 - 2238): Finance Minister, assassinated by car bomb. The GCP was blamed for the killing and used as an excuse to instigate Martial Law.

ZABIR, YOUSEF (2216 - 2249): A mechanic. Fought as a member of the Red Guard. He survived the nuclear strike, which destroyed his home town of Galena. Uranium Fist still got him in the end, he died of leukaemia contracted as a result of radiation poisoning.

POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS

THE following organisations were some of the more important political actors in Greyermede's affairs right through the revolutionary phase. Not all have been mentioned in the text of this book.

BLACK OCTOBER: Formed in 2238. This organisation was a self-proclaimed socialist party (though non-Marxist), with anarchist tendencies. Its principle source of support was found within the middle class, especially students and the intelligentsia. It appeared following the Black October massacre of 2238, when

Terran troops slaughtered protestors gathered in Peterloo Square, Trafalgar. It was a shadowy, conspiratorial group renowned for its terrorist tactics.

[THE] COLONIAL INTELLIGENCE SERVICE (GREYERMEDE): The division of the Terran combined secret service organisations, dedicated to intelligence gathering and counter-insurgency throughout Earth's vast territorial holdings.

[THE] COMMUNIST UNIVERSAL: An interplanetary organisation encompassing the major revolutionary and non-revolutionary left-wing parties. It was formed in 2105 to aid communication and co-operation between the member organisations.

FREE PEOPLES' LEAGUE: A terrorist organisation that emerged from the bones of the smashed opposition parties. This group carried out terrorist attacks against the Colonial Government, and later turned its hatred against the young workers'-planet.

FRIENDS OF EARTH: Formed in 2234. A front organisation for factions within the political elite opposed to independence. FOE received considerable financial backing from a number of offworld sources. It was dedicated to propagating pro-Terran propaganda amongst the population. It proved incapable of combating the anti-Terran sentiments espoused by the intelligentsia and the media. The organisation collapsed after leaked documents revealed the sources of its financial support.

GREYERMEDE COMMUNIST PARTY: Formed in 2215. Marxist, revolutionary party. Affiliated to the Communist Universal in 2223. This organisation won extensive support and membership within the working class in the years running up to the Revolution. They then formed the leadership of the Revolution. It was destroyed as a result of the counter-revolution.

GREYERMEDE LIBERATION FRONT: Formed in 2236. Another of the middle class opposition groups. This one only possessed a minority of support. It was dedicated to an independent, capitalist Greyermede. This was another terrorist organisation. Though not proved, it is rumoured to be responsible for the killing of Edward Wilton in 2238. It is also rumoured they had Martian aid in carrying out this assassination.

GREYERMEDE MILITANT LABOUR PARTY: Formed in 2163. The leading

workers' party in Greyermede's early history. An umbrella for many political tendencies. Because of a split, the party gave birth to two major parties, the GCP and the WDF. The ZMLP lasted another five years following this split.

INDEPENDENCE PARTY: Formed in 2233. The main opposition party of the colony's middle class. As its name suggests, its aim was for complete independence from Earth. Initially it favoured peaceful means to secession, but later came to favour more confrontational means.

ORDER OF GAIA: A semi-religious body with only a minority of support in the population. It was extensively supported in the early trans-world expansion phase by Terran capitalists but abandoned soon after. The organisation proclaimed Earth to be a 'supra-entity' consisting of all life on Earth. Man was its consciousness, and its gatherers. The capitalist corporations were presented as the mechanisms by which Gaia gathered its sustenance. It was a complex argument justifying working class exploitation as a necessary sacrifice of the individual for the needs of the greater organism.

OPPOSITION COALITION: As its name signifies, this was a coalition of the main opposition parties pursuing independence. The parties involved were all of the middle class, capitalist orientated bodies. 'Extremist' parties were not allowed to enter. This organisation began the work to establish a Colonial Assembly, but its aims and its organisation were smashed in the aftermath of Black October.

PATRIOTIC FRONT: A neo-Nazi group that gained little headway within any sector of Greyermede society. It received some backing, however, from Terran, and later colonial, capitalist and government agencies to combat the rise of socialism. It was broken as a political force by the working class organisations' resistance, and turned to terrorism against the young workers'-planet.

[THE] POPULIST PARTY OF GREYERMEDE: One of the many middle class parties that formed to promote independence. The PPZ, however, was a long-standing party, with backing from colonial capital. It received a massive boost in support following the recession in 2232. Maxwell Steadman, one time pretender to the Presidency, was once a member, but later switched to the Independence Party, which he helped to found.

PROLETARIAN POWER: A minority organisation within the working class. Its

main area of support was found in the grain belts of the colony, from the rural proletariat. The party had slight anarchist tendencies, but worked alongside the GCP in the workers' councils, and in the workers' state that developed from these.

TRADE UNION FEDERATION: The collective by which the colony's trade union movement was co-ordinated. Every important union was federated within this organisation. Following negotiations, the TUF joined the Opposition Coalition, bringing the support of the workers to the middle class parties, via their respective unions. The unions and the TUF were officially illegal, but they had long been tolerated by the Colonial regime.

WORKERS' DEMOCRATIC FRONT: Formed 2215. The other major workers' party formed because of a split in the ZMLP. A quasi-Marxist party with reformist leanings. The party was a major rival of the GCP until it outstripped their support because of the revolutionary unrest. The party's left wing worked closely with the GCP during the Revolution.

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

2133: Discovery of Greyermede. Primary surveys of surface conducted.

2140: Planetary engineers begin development of colonial infrastructure.

2160: First wave of large scale immigration. Formation of settler colonies.

2163: Formation of Greyermede Militant Labour Party.

2168: Transition to Colonial government.

2172: Economy expanded beyond industrial autarky. Moves to becoming an industrial economy.

2179: Central Bank formed to aid regulation of the economy.

2180: Colony's economy enters a prolonged growth phase. In next few decades extensive growth in economy, only slightly hindered by the cycle of boom and slump.

2215: Split in ZMLP gives rise to GCP and WDF.

2232: Deep recession sweeps through the galaxy. Greyermede heavily hit. Enters a period of stagnation with high unemployment, declining exports, and loss of investment. Growth of dissatisfaction with Colonial regime.

2233: Rise in communist and trade-union activity. Beginnings of widespread social and political unrest.

2234: Formation of Friends Of Earth.

2236: Formation of the Greyermede Liberation Front.

2238:

30 March: Assassination of Edward Wilton.

3 April: Allegations of communist insurgency behind terrorist violence. State of emergency called. Outbreak of anti-govt demonstrations.

10 August: Large demonstrations in Firsthaven. Riots break out. Two people killed by police.

14 August: Widespread outbreak of strikes as workers' organisations join anti-govt coalition. Workers' councils begin to appear in embryo.

15 August: Militia called in to deal with protests.

September: Protests continue. Militia proves unwilling to deal with protests, power vacuum goes on.

October: GCP becomes major political force within working class.

9 October: Massive demo in Trafalgar, protestors assemble in Peterloo Square for rally. Terran troops attack crowds killing 3,000 people. The 'Black October' massacre.

10-18 October: Collapse of middle class opposition groups. Formation of Black October. GCP now the dominant oppositionist group.

October/November: Civil war erupts between armed workers and the militia against pro-govt forces.

November/December: GCP leaders begin to come out of hiding. Minsky returns to Trafalgar.

20 December: Colonial govt finally collapses. Armed workers storm Colony House. Minsky declares Greyermede a workers'-planet.

21 December: Simon McCrowly executed by workers from his private estate. Thomas Franklin gunned down as militia attempt his arrest.

27 December: Minsky assassinated by Black October assassin.

2239:

January-April: Revolutionaries undertake massive transition to socialism.

March: Earth begins to assemble its fleet in secret.

3 April: Fleet departs for Greyermede.

18 April: Surprise assault on Gateway City. First orbital bombardment destroys revolution.

18-19 April: Extensive conventional bombardment. Hasty formation of Red Army under O'Brien. Collapse of working class rule.

20-21 April: Troops and military hardware landed at strategic points over planet. Battle of Trafalgar-Firsthaven Axis. Red victory.

25 April: Terrans overrun much of planet. Lay siege to Trafalgar and Firsthaven.

26 April: Fall of Firsthaven.

27 April: Red Army collapsed to a rump. Resistance now in hands of several guerrilla groups.

28 April: Trafalgar still holds out, otherwise Greyermede conquered.

29 April: Establishment of military rule pending return of colonial govt. Terror begins in earnest.

2 May: Massacre of Reds in the Galena Valley.

4 May: Sue Reid travels to Trafalgar.

9 May: Dutton restored as governor to form a provisional govt. Heavily bolstered by military presence.

30 May: Sue Reid expelled from colony for writing about conditions.

Biography

FOR years Mark Cantrell has lounged around in the bars and cafés of his native Bradford, searching for his elusive literary chic; he never quite found it, so he had to make do with penning poems, short stories and novels.

Some of these have made it into the meme-pool, courtesy of his own self-published chapbooks and various small press fiction and poetry magazines, such as *The Asphalt Jungle*, *Sci-Fright*, *Alternaties*, *Decanto*, and others. His work has also appeared in anthologies such as *Spirit of Darkness* (1998), *Love, Sex, Death & Carrots* (2000), and *Sundoves, Bumblebees & Bluestreak Bananas* (2002).

These days, he flits between Stoke-on-Trent, where he lives, and Manchester where he works as a journalist for trade magazines. He has also written for *Writers' News*, chronicling the activities of his fellow Yorkshire scribes. In a similar vein, he edited the monthly *Tyke Writer* newsletter for three years. It gained something akin to a cult following before he had to put it on long term hold.

Mark studied political theory at Liverpool University before training to be a journalist at the City University, London. Even then, he was hooked on the literary drug - so it took a while before he finally sauntered into an editorial office.

More of his work, covering journalism, fiction and poetry can be read at his website and associated blogs: *Tyke Writer Export*.

www.tykewriter.supanet.com

Mark Cantrell,

Bradford, September 1999

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1 Uranium Fist was my first novel, conceived and developed in 1992 and written in 1993 whilst I was a student of politics at the University of Liverpool. It was later edited and revised, with a newly written prologue and introductory chapter.

2 John Reed was a journalist who wrote for such publications as The Masses. He covered such events as the Mexican revolution but came to prominence at least among Left-wing circles for his coverage of the Bolshevik Revolution and the book Ten Days That Shook The World.

3 Experimental in the sense that I did not know if the book would work in such a format, and also because at the time I was not a journalist, merely aspiring to be one, so my 'journalism' in the book may not have been quite up to the mark.

4 In the first draft (that I never revised and polished in the beginning), the planet was given the naff name of Zaramajken.

5 CIS: Colonial Intelligence Service. See 'Political Organisations' - Ed.

6 From the GCP's Central Committee - SR.

7 NBS: News Broadcasting Service - SR.

8 MNN: Martian News Network - SR.

9 RNS: Reuters News Service - SR.

10 Nigel Chamberlain was the president of the Western Spiral Arm Company at the time of Greyermede's discovery. This company co-owned the world - SR.

11 Electronic Counter Measures - Ed.

12 Times (Earth) editorial, penned by then editor Ian Livingstone - Ed.

13 Japanese Corporations financed the colonial development of the planet - SR.

14 Terra-Luna Armaments Corporation - Ed.

15 Yousef Zabir succumbed to leukaemia shortly before publication - Ed.

16 Nuclear, Biological, Chemical protection suits - Ed.

17 Sue Reid was expelled from Greyermede shortly afterwards - Ed.