

The Iovian Moon Base

A quivering hand held the rusty pen. Leaking, an imperceptible drip by drip, ink seeped out of the tip, causing a round ball to grow bigger. Heavy breathing, sweat drops building on a forehead, tensed with crease lines, directed beautiful eyes towards the ramshackle crowd.

They'd expected more, not just more of the same, especially from this general. They were defeated. A dirty paper with hastily scribbled words glared back at Tyrone Caladron. The evening's light shot streaks of sickly pale yellow over the parchment.

The citizens were horrified, their Tyrone, a true leader, had sunk his final sword thrust, missing the invader's heart.

Overconfident megalomaniacs had traditionally led the faithful to open pits. Cleavers waving wildly, hate-filled dervishes would commit unimaginable atrocities, crimes, and horrors yet to be categorized. Terror was the traditional ointment. They'd applied it copiously to defenseless civilians. Now the Iovions, those still alive, were preparing to be the next victims in a growing pile of corpses, now bones.

The shield was down. Without that shield, they were defenseless; nothing was stopping the invaders. General Caladron's remaining battalion had been crushed. The Iovions were defeated.

If only it were a matter of restoring power to the Truss Array, but the Energy Absorbers orbiting their star, Proximia, were the first to be destroyed. Power transmission ceased, and the hot connection went dead a few moments after the invaders had entered their solar system.

Long a source of contention, the logic of investing in a backup energy source was no longer disputed. Only stand-alone weaponry that had its own internal power supply could be deployed; the aggressors, with their ships' vaporization batteries fully charged, had free rein; they couldn't be stopped.

At the outset, the System Wars were more a series of battles than a sustained, drawn-out war. Wave upon wave of maunders came and scoured the planets clean of all marketable commodities.

With no food, saleable products, or factories, the lovions could only scavenge and sift through the dust for edible scraps. Many died; there was just barely enough left to feed a population of trillions spanning five now desolate planets.

The old, weak, and process/pattern-bound perished. Joining a looting ring, the young survived, just barely.

With the power no longer streaming across the vacuum, civilization ended. The government, or what should more rightly be classified as a bureaucratic fraternity, devolved faster.

Filling a vacuum was never difficult; the problem is what fills the void.

Former military generals bred on discipline and orders were quick to institute top-down authoritarian regimes. Taking what they desired, decency now an alien concept, they killed, raped, and pillaged randomly.

Formulating a plan, ensuring fundamental rights were niceties. When your enemy could deploy an Energy Torch capable of sterilizing entire planets of all organic life, norms of any flavor no longer applied. Brute unbridled savagery became the anointed objective.

Tyrone was different; he had a kind, flexible mind - highly unusual for a general. Having risen through the ranks, not cherry-picked by other ritual-bound box-thinkers, Tyrone had to fight his way up a stratified hierarchy that resisted creativity. His difficult accent transformed him from an unquestioning follower into a unique individual.

When he assumed leadership after all the worthless incompetents had been annihilated, the people were sure they'd be saved from the bloodthirsty invaders and their own flavor-of-the-day tyrants. But no one expected him to lose, and so quickly.

Already a legend, having single-handedly won many wars against the sixth planet, Korivon, he had earned the respect of the rank-and-file long before the invaders arrived.

The police state that was the Korivon People's Republic was a regime that regularly caused trouble by raiding the lovion Confederation planet Wavolon, a mere moon's throw from Korivon.

Ruling Korivon was a tenth-generation degenerate named Raldo Fifth, or to be more precise, His Eminence Fifth Ducho. Placing the Fifth Ducho of despicability back in his cage after personally fighting the bastard for a third time, Tyrone came up with a simple but ingenious way to stop the tyrant from reaching Wavolon. He'd suggested that an early warning system composed of satellites midway between Wavolon and Korivon be deployed

to notify the Iovion military when the Korivons were heading for Wavolon for yet another pillage party.

This worked magnificently; the bored Korivons never again made it to Wavolon, so their ruler had to devise some other means of getting his jollies, like killing a few more citizens or torturing them in more 'interesting' ways. So, until the subjects of Korivon revolted, if they had the guts to revolt, they were on tap for a whole slew of new infractions punishable by execution or whatever the sadists in the dungeons had devised in the way of fresh new tortures.

His latest creative splash in a career that was nothing short of brilliant made Tyrone many jealous enemies, but mainly with those who were incapable of seeing past their noses. That is why Tyrone was the lowest-ranking general in the entire Iovion military - the fearful incompetents wouldn't allow him to shine too brightly, or their dim wits would be highlighted. So, what the citizens of the Iovion system knew from what they'd heard from the media was just a fraction of Tyrone's genius; most of his brilliance had been co-opted by worthless superiors.

That fraction, a tiny spec of perfection, was still enough to make Tyrone a legend. The people were captivated by his good looks and superior intellect.

They mostly admired his big-picture depth. When others got bogged down in the weeds, Tyrone could soar up high. Surveying the full breadth of a problem, he'd devised revolutionary stratagems, not the worn-out solutions employed by his counterparts. Simply put, he had no trouble deviating from prescribed military doctrine, shifting gears, or devising new strategies that were sometimes totally unorthodox.

Sinking the pen on the signature line, the contrite-looking Tyrone signed his name with gusto.

Never expecting that a defeated dark-skinned primate humanoid would or could trick the Gorg, their invasion fleet had already left, and it had a long journey past many galaxies to reach their home at the far edge of the universe.

Leaving only a Suppression Force comprised of a single battalion to ensure the 'cooperation' of the natives, the Gorg were confident, being the super race that they were, that this was just another off-world slaughter picnic. How could a system comprised of dark-skinned sentient primates be a threat, especially now?

In their process-riddled minds, the Extraction, the clean term for killing, and pillage would progress smoothly, without incident. The vanquished never raised a hand, paw, or claw in

anger at the Gorg; they cowered in a corner or walked obediently to the Termination Stations - it was their duty, as beaten subjects, to give up.

Tyrone, who was sitting in the corner of a Captrone sealed hole with an energy shield misting a red haze over the opening of the pit, listened attentively. When he was sure that the guard, a lumbering rat-like creature, fur-covered, small, tiny red eyes, with an oversized head, had lain down in the acrylic nest he'd spied before being dropped in the pit, he started whispering.

"Nelson, can you hear me?"

"Yes, general," was the reply on the thread transmitter, only audible to Tyrone.

"These vermin are going to execute me at dawn's first light. We need to speed up our plan. Have you verified that the last Gorg battle cruiser has left our system?"

"Yes, sir; The Cyiloc Detection System you'd extended from Korivon space has confirmed the breach of the last Gorg cruiser heading toward open space. None have left for about six maxicons."

"Excellent, assemble the second, fourth, and fifth battalions on the Morbion moon base for the planned assault. Keep the third battalion in the rear as planned." Tyrone's words were calm and measured, for this wasn't the first time he'd been in a tough spot.

"General, if we capture prisoners, does the War Conventions Treaty apply?" The words carried a hate-filled tone; it was obvious that Nelson Malo had lost some family members to the vermin invasion.

"General Malo, sinking to the enemy's level is not advisable, decent, or honorable. We must not shred our laws or beliefs at the first sign of danger. Therefore, the War Conventions Treaty remains in effect, even though our combatants were invaders from outside our system. Place any captured prisoners in the newly constructed prisons, which were intended for the Korivons. We'll discuss with the remaining Members of Parliament how we'll arrange for prisoner transfers, but right now let's concentrate on freeing our citizens."

"Yes, sir."

The conversation was concluded.

Tyrone still recalled vividly the events that led to the construction of the Morbion moon base. When he'd requested funding for the base, most MPs thought that spending money on a massive hollowed-out military base was just plain crazy. Morbion circled the dead world of Serpicos. Why have a major military base in a strategically insignificant location? But as Tyrone explained, that was just where what he termed a Hail Mary base should be

built - someplace that an enemy more dangerous than the Korivon troublemakers would never suspect.

It took a lot of convincing; the deadwood in the upper echelon of the military and brain-dead political hacks had to be spoon-fed rationality. They couldn't distill too much of it at a time since they were persistently awash in illusion.

After his last rout of the Korivons and the peace that followed the deployment of the Cyiloc Detection System near Korivon space, the elites grudgingly agreed to the funding of the base. They had to; Tyrone's popularity had reached superstar status. The citizens, especially those on Wavolon, were captivated by his every action, for here was a genuine leader, not a standard, run-of-the-mill smiling puff doll.

Thuds could be felt and heard by Tyrone in his little tomb. Attempting to see through the energy shield up top, he barely made out short bursts of orange light that coincided with the now louder bangs. The vermin creatures were squealing loudly.

Tyrone concluded that a good-sized battalion was wiping out this central nest. The energy shield started blinking on and off; he knew that, like any well-trained army, they were attacking the command & control hub and power centers first. He'd taught this latest batch of recruits personally, so he did not doubt that they'd easily crush the enemy.

With all the critics howling, ripping Tyrone apart after he'd successfully negotiated the cesspool called elite politics, it was only fitting that these media parrots would field what they thought would be the end of his career. They believed they'd finally backed General Tyrone, the outspoken, egotistical misfit genius, into a trap.

This was the opportunity the elites had sought; they'd send him away to command a force that would never be used, on his moon, far removed from the heart of Iovion civilization, and they felt they had been blessed with the perfect solution to the ultimate troublemaker.

If it hadn't been for Tyrone's advance deployment of a battalion from the moon base to the far end of the system, and its eventual use in a ruse to make the rat enemy believe this was all that remained of the system's military, all the leftover elites, hell, every last Iovion would be facing certain death.

These were expert scavengers, foraging for the resources and products of many systems. They had no desire to subjugate a large population. Tyrone knew right off what their objective was based upon reports he'd received from spies operating in other galaxies near systems that had faced this same enemy. Their modus operandi was to slaughter the entire population and then send in transports to clean out the goodies.

Looking up, Tyrone noticed that the energy field, or more precisely, what was left of an energy field, was off; he could see the stars set against a black sky. Cries from dying rodents could be heard; these piercing, high-pitched squeals were getting closer to his hole.

Flashes, not the sky-brightening kind, but the short, quick bursts from an energy gun, were blinking like lightning he'd seen on Norvo during an intense electrical storm. Seeing the tight orange-red energy beams over his pit, Tyrone knew it was just a matter of time before he'd be rescued.

Dead silence, no blinking energy bursts, hurried feet could now be heard moving towards his hole. He'd assumed that his force won the battle, but what if it hadn't? Ready to die from the moment he was captured, he knew that if his force lost, those rats would immediately execute him, slowly, in the cruelest way possible; they'd take vengeance for the killing of their fellow vermin.

Tyrone's heart skipped a beat when a head appeared over the opening up top.

"General Caladron, hang tight, sir, we'll G-Lift you out of there." It was a welcome voice, a precise, strong voice that called down to him.

Almost instantly, a purple tube flowed down the shaft, encircling Tyrone in tiny fingers of Techtron Anti-Matter. The disgorgement of the organic matter that was Tyrone adjusted very slowly, moving him upward to the opening ever so gradually. At the opening, the G-Lift glided his feet over the lip of the hole, planting them firmly a reasonable distance from the opening.

Facing Tyrone was his staff, the most senior of his personally trained force. Saluting crisply, Tyrone acknowledged them by saluting back, and he stepped forward to embrace each of them in a show of appreciation.

Seated at the large oval table in the operational heart of his moon base, Tyrone, along with the still breathing MPs, mind's undoubtedly a tad more mushy than usual, and their crony business elite handlers in seats close by to keep them in line looked at each other with a feeling of mutually shared relief. This had been a close call.

Humming in the background, all the artificial intelligence systems performed the docking, monitoring, and controlling of thousands of interconnected 'blocks' that consisted of war cruisers and a myriad of other finely tuned precision elements of this magnificent creation. It was the brainchild of a mind that knew no barriers, a genuinely gifted, singularly individual being: Tyrone Caladron.

Silence on the Plains



Ray Pairan