

The Conron Compromise

Book 6 of the Alliance Conflict

By Jeff Sims

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Chapter 1

“Is it true?” Frank’s wife asked.

Frank immediately wanted to respond ‘Is what true’, but he refrained. He had a pretty good idea what the ‘it’ was. He also had a pretty good idea that the ‘it’ in question was true. Besides, even if it wasn’t exactly true, it certainly wasn’t false.

Frank responded, “It certainly appears that we were duped. At this point we have no reason to doubt the veracity of the story. However, I am certain that there is more to the story than what was reported on the news.”

He paused for a moment and added knowingly, “There always is.”

His wife responded, “Maybe you could check at the ...” She stopped and restarted, “Maybe you could ask the senate...” She stopped and restarted, “You should try to investigate this somehow,” she finished.

As her previous statement showed, Frank’s wife still wasn’t quite used to his retirement from the Associate Council in specific and politics in general. She was thrilled to have him all to herself, but it was taking time for her to get used to it.

So was he for that matter. He had forgotten he was retired on more than one occasion. He also agreed with her assessment. He should do something. At a minimum he should try to discover what really happened.

Frank responded, “I think many of the facts speak for themselves. First, I think that the nice young woman who transported us from Opron to Conron was indeed a Human. Second, she was masquerading as a Solarian named Jenna Dogpound. The report indicated that her real name was Jenny Sledgehammer. We have no reason to doubt any of these facts.”

Frank already knew all of these statements were true. He hadn’t told his wife that he knew she was a Human when he hired her. At this point he doubted that he ever would. It was easier to continue the lie that he had been duped than it was to admit that he had potentially aided and abetted a war criminal – and hid it from his wife.

Frank continued, “However, I know from my time as an Alliance Senator that several of the facts reported in the news report are just plain false.”

“Which ones?” his wife asked.

Frank responded, “Well, primarily the portion of the report where they stated that Jenny Sledgehammer escaped from the Conron Alliance Navy Depot & Shipyard and the Alliance Navy covered it up. I can assure you that there was no cover-up by the Alliance Navy. None of the Humans escaped from that station.”

He briefly thought that the name of the station was way too long and that someone somewhere should think of an acronym for it. He suddenly recalled that Jack Dogbarks had once referred to it as CANDY. Nope, Frank thought, he still didn’t like that one.

He mentally tried the Conron Associate Navy Shipyard. That gave him CANS. Nope, he decided – CANS really wasn't any better than CANDY.

She hastily replied, "You don't know for that for certain. If she escaped and the Navy covered it up, then you wouldn't have known she escaped because the Navy covered it up. Therefore, it is certainly possible that she escaped from the shipyard and the Navy covered it up. We can't rule it out simply because you weren't informed." She gave him an 'I just made a counterpoint you can't refute' smile for emphasis.

He answered, "The Navy kept very close track of the Humans on the station. All were present and accounted for. They didn't misplace any of them and none of them escaped."

"Are you sure?" his wife asked. She stopped smiling.

Frank responded, "I personally reviewed the names and descriptions of all 70 Humans that were stationed on the station. Jenny was not one of the Humans on the station." He overemphasized the word station for effect. He gave her a firm, but polite 'counterpoint countered' smile.

"What about Solaria?" His wife countered. Clearly, she was not ready to concede the point just because Frank had countered the counter point.

She continued, "Perhaps Jack Dogbarks or Victor Bullpeep took her directly from Earth to Solaria. Maybe Earth was able to build hyper capable ships earlier than announced and she flew directly from Earth to Solaria."

Frank shrugged. Anything was possible, but he felt very confident that this was not one of them. He responded, "No. Earth was not able to build ships until Carank and Lorano designed that abomination of a cruiser that the Humans could actually construct."

He added, "Further, they were not able to build a ship capable of leaving their solar system even with Lorano's help. That is why they attacked the Hirculans in Conron and stole the hyper bubble manufacturing process from the Conron Navy Depot."

"Fair point," his wife finally conceded. "How about the second option?"

It was technically the first, but Frank decided not to correct her. He replied, "There is no evidence that Jenny, or any Human for that matter, has ever visited Solaria."

He realized that he was open to an immediate counter attack, so he added, "You are correct though, if either Jack or Victor managed to successfully smuggle her to Solaria then there would be no way to know."

"But..." Frank drew out the word and paused for effect. "Even if she did somehow sneak onto Solaria, she didn't have a Hirculan beam weapon. I can assure you that the Hirculans do not give away their beam weapons willy-nilly."

He continued, "Remember, I studied all of the documentation surrounding Senator Figur's assassination and I was the one that found the body."

"I had forgotten that," she responded.

Frank added, “The interesting fact is that the Hirculans publicly stated that Jenny used a stolen Hirculan beam weapon to kill Figur. However, the Hirculans did not report any of their weapons missing at the time of the murder.”

“So, the Hirculans are not being entirely truthful.” His wife concluded.

“Yes,” Frank responded. “If they are lying about the beam weapon then they are more than likely lying about the shooter too. Trust me, this whole ugly incident was just a political maneuver to get the galaxy to distrust Humans even more than they already do.”

His wife asked, “Why would they want to do that?”

Frank answered, “So that they can justify the Hirculan Navy conquering Earth and enslaving the Humans.”

Besides, Frank knew for a fact that Jenny Sledgehammer did not go to Solaria and kill Senator Figur with a stolen Hirculan beam weapon. He knew this because he had a secret operative construct a self-destructing beam weapon with a Hirculan energy signature.

Then, during the Solarian Celebration, he shot and killed Senator Figur and blamed the murder on the Hirculans. It was indeed a political maneuver, though one designed to make the galaxy distrust the Hirculans. Unfortunately, it seemed to have backfired.

He did not share this fact with his wife though. He intended to take this particular secret to his grave. Well, technically he would not take it to a grave. Hirculans were cremated and their remains were placed in a 10 cm by 10 cm by 10 cm (4” x 4” x 4”) box. The boxes were stored chronologically in a huge chamber known as Incineration Hall. Still though, the point remained – even if the remains remained elsewhere.

(Originally the cremated remains were stored alphabetically, but incineration workers soon tired of rearranging everyone every time someone died.)

Frank felt like he had to do something to help resolve the mystery surrounding Jenny Sledgehammer’s surprise attack. He really didn’t know what to do though. He could wander into the Advranki Government Chamber (formerly the Alliance Senate building) and see if any of his old friends were still there and willing to talk.

Perhaps he could question a few of them and see if he could get any more information about why Jenny Doghammer blew up the entire Advranki High Council. He mentally corrected her last name to Sledgehammer and mouthed a silent apology to Jenny. He supposed it didn’t matter though because she was dead.

His wife brought him out of his reverie. She said, “Switching subjects, what do you think about the Human fleet. They ruthlessly attacked Opron and tried to kidnap the Association Council. The Humans almost succeeded. They were thwarted at the last moment by the heroic sacrifice of hundreds of Association soldiers. Can you imagine what would have happened if the Humans had succeeded?”

Frank mentally interpreted her question to mean – What would have happened to us if you were still an Association Council member and the Humans had kidnapped us? He then mentally translated the question to – do Humans really eat other races?

Frank answered, “No. If we had been there and been kidnapped I don’t think the Humans would have eaten us. I firmly believe that Humans do not eat other races and the whole incident 70 years ago was just a giant misunderstanding on our part.”

“Misunderstanding?” his wife repeated, clearly misunderstanding.

Frank waved his hands in the air to show the matter had been decided long ago. He saw that she wasn’t convinced by the hand gesture. He then gave her a ‘the matter was settled long ago’ smile. It worked, somewhat.

She said, “Remind me how it was settled.”

He responded, “During a mission to Earth 70 years ago an Altian ship crash landed in an area called Arizona. The entire crew died upon impact, but the flight recorders in their suits kept recording. It recorded a Human cutting open the dead Altians and pulling out their intestines. The recording stopped immediately after that.”

He paused for a breath and continued, “Since there was no context, this action was widely interpreted as - the Humans were going to eat the bodies.”

He continued, “However, we later found out that Human medicine is not very advanced and Earth doctors regularly cut open patients to repair internal hemorrhaging. So in reality the Human in the video was a doctor and he cut the bodies open in a misguided attempt to save their lives.”

“Okay,” she responded in apparent acknowledgement that they would not have become a meal. “Still, can you imagine the chaos that would have ensued if they had managed to kidnap the Association Council?”

“Yes,” Frank answered and smiled politely. “It certainly would have been chaotic. I am sure the members of the council would have been rather perturbed with the interruption to their important agenda.”

He had said it as absolutely sarcastically as possible, but his wife nodded in agreement anyway. He considered rewording it, but gave an ‘I am being sarcastic’ smile instead.

She replied, “Still, you have to admit that the optics of Humans stealing commercial ovens that are large enough to cook every other species isn’t very good.”

“You are correct,” Frank conceded. He felt like he was missing something important though. The Humans’ actions in Opron really did not make any logical sense.

Frank said, “Computer, display the ... most recent battle of Opron on the main monitor.” He wasn’t sure exactly how many battles had been fought in Opron at this point. He thought maybe two or three. He could have researched it, but he was too lazy.

The video playback showed the evil Humans mysteriously arriving in Opron through the seldom used hyperspace lane from Trilon. He knew they were evil Humans because there were subtitles on the video monitor identifying them as such. Plus, the narrator used the term evil Humans twice.

However, the helpful sub-titles at the bottom of the screen really were not needed. Everyone knew that the ships in question belonged to Earth - The Human cruisers were small and poorly constructed. There were weld seams on every major joint. Plus, they had the letters UEN and a ship name painted on the side. Overall, the ships looked terrible.

No other race built ships that looked like that. In fact, no other race felt the need to paint things on the side of their ships. That was why transponders were invented – for the express purpose of not having to physically identify ships. Heck, no other race would be caught alive in one of those ships.

Frank was, quite frankly, surprised that the monstrosities could even glide through hyperspace. It certainly appeared that at any moment, one of the poorly constructed panels would fall off and doom the ship.

The Earth fleet just sat beside the lane for a long period of time. They seemed to be waiting for something. The narrator stated the reason for the delay was that the Humans contacted traffic control and actually requested a flight path to the Spindle Station. He then pointed out that the request was firmly, but politely denied.

The confused Humans then suddenly disappeared. They reappeared a few hours later at the beginning of the Opron – Conron hyperspace lane. They were directly in the line with the Spindle Station; where the Associate Council was housed.

The Hiriculan fleet immediately stationed themselves as closely as possible to the Spindle Station to provide a desperate last line of defense. The Human fleet continued on a straight line path toward the Spindle Station, but sailed right past it without firing a shot at the station or engaging the fleet guarding it.

This seemed to match the narrative that the Humans realized they were outmatched and avoided contact. It also matched the narrative that the Humans were stupid and attacked the wrong station or angry and attacked the nearest station out of pure spite or possibly bloodlust. Hunger was even implied, though not mentioned directly.

Frank really didn't like any of the theories. The Humans were known for fighting against overwhelming odds. And yes, they weren't technologically advanced, but that didn't mean that they made silly errors in judgement. Frank believed that the Humans knew exactly what they were doing, but whatever it was they were doing was unbeknown to everyone else.

He continued the playback. The UEN fighters blew a hole in the shipyard located next to the Spindle Station. They launched a group of transports through the hole and into the station. The Human fighters (marines Frank mentally supplied) then jumped out of their transports wearing their weird looking combat armor. Frank chuckled to himself; they really looked silly in those things.

A small group of HAS units guarded the door to the rest of the station. The Humans attacked with wave after wave in a horrendous assault. The brave defenders fought a fierce battle, but were eventually overwhelmed by the huge number of Humans. The remaining soldiers barricaded themselves behind a massive bulkhead. Their fast thinking saved all of the military member's lives.

The Humans proceeded directly to level 7 – the civilian level - and threatened several students in a cooking class. One massive, unarmored Human dragged a student chef named Thiad'bo out of the class room and to the student lounge for questioning.

At first she refused to answer their questions, but they used a horrific interrogation tool on her. Frank seemed to remember either Crista or Victor describing the weapon after their trip to Earth. At any rate Thiad'bo buckled under the intense torture and gave them access to the computer system.

The Humans proceeded to download dessert recipes. Recipes? That couldn't be right Frank thought. Why would they need recipes?

Finally the Humans searched the distribution center and stole a wide variety of items. They stole a batch of new ovens, but left a crate of hyper distributors untouched. They took a ton of raw steel worth pennies and left two hyper communications satellites worth hundreds of millions of dollars. They didn't even try to hack the military computer or try to steal personnel data or fleet assignments.

This spawned a whole series of non-politically correct jokes such as: Why did the Human steal the Model 345.22.18 juicer but leave the Model 44.367.10 quadric phase randomizer? The answer - because his intelligence quotient is below average. Frank's personal favorite was: Why did the Human cross the solar system? Answer - To get to the other side.

Then the marines returned to their ships and the whole fleet left. Again, there was no logical reason for their actions. It was rumored that Admiral Slear's fleet was there as well and the two fleets were working together, but there was no mention of Admiral Slear or his fleet in the documentary.

Honestly, the whole attack seemed unplanned, uncoordinated, and just plain random.

Frank waved for his wife to get out of the viewing area and said, "Computer, contact Colok, standard security level." As a civilian he only had standard security level and really did not need to specify the level. However, old habits were difficult to break.

He recalled that Colok was very abrupt, especially for a politician. Frank decided to come to the point as quickly as possible.

...Connection established...

Frank said, "Hello, esteemed council member. Thank you for taking my call on such short notice. I truly and earnestly appreciate your humble hospitality on my behalf."

Colok responded, "It is always my pleasure to speak with my mentor and the former leader of the Advranki people. Your career in politics is truly to be commended."

Frank had considerably shortened his opening speech and noticed that Colok had done the same. Good, he had read the other statesman correctly. Frank decided to get directly to the point.

Frank responded, “I just heard the news about your beautiful daughter Lexxi. I must admit the young woman has had an extraordinary career so far – military hero, planetary explorer, and now ambassador to Earth. She is certainly using every opportunity to her advantage.”

Frank had chosen his words carefully. First, he left out the fact that she had just gotten married and second that she was an interstellar terrorist. He figured that Colok was probably okay with the latter, but might still be a little upset with the former. It was best to avoid both subjects for the moment.

“Thank you again for getting her assigned to the *Sunflower* and helping launch her career,” Colok responded. “She has certainly exceeded my expectations.”

He paused for a moment and added, “You may not have heard, but she recently got married to a scientist named Carank. He seems to be a fine young man. I understand that you worked with him on a couple of occasions.”

Frank knew that Colok knew that he knew that she had gotten married. How could he not know? It was, quite possibly, the most watched wedding of the century – heck maybe even of the millennia. To be clear though, it wasn’t so much the wedding that drew the viewers, it was the surroundings. Well, it was also the wedding.

First, Lexxi was a notorious interstellar terrorist. Second, she was marrying another interstellar terrorist in a double wedding with two other interstellar terrorists - the Altians Clowy and Lorano. This was the first double wedding that included members of two races in over 2,200 years and the first containing four interstellar terrorists in known history.

Next, Admiral Solear, yet another interstellar terrorist, was marrying them. There were only six interstellar terrorists in the galaxy and five of them were on the stage at the same time.

(Crista and Victor had been removed from the list and replaced with Solear and Arian.)

Finally, there were thousands of Humans present. This was what set her wedding apart and made so many beings watch it. One couldn’t help feeling a shiver of fear when the Humans stood up in unison and began clapping their hands together. It seemed eerie and to be perfectly honest, a little bit scary.

“Yes,” Frank replied. “I had the pleasure to work with Carank on more than one occasion.” He thought it was two occasions, but wasn’t entirely sure. However, more than one was technically correct and spared him the difficulty of trying to remember exactly how many times they had worked together. Still though, he thought it was two; or maybe three.

Frank continued, “Carank is a brilliant scientist and seems to be a good match for her. I hope they are happy together.”

Frank did not mention that she and Carank were both banished from civilized space and he was probably the only available Advranki male in that quadrant of the galaxy. That point literally went without saying.

Frank decided to be a little more direct. He skipped the normally obligatory topics like the weather, his most recent meals, and the recent match by their favorite debate team.

He said, “How is Lexxi doing as Earth’s ambassador?”

Colok thought for a moment and finally responded, “Well, there is a legal question about whether a wanted criminal can hold a public office. Otherwise, she seems to be performing the minimum functions of the job adequately enough I suppose. Apparently she has made it her mission to get the Humans to open a decent hair care studio.”

“Ah,” Frank responded. “It sounds like she is accomplishing some important work.” He paused momentarily and added, “Speaking of Earth, do you have any idea why the Humans sent their ... fleet to Opron and tried to kidnap the leaders of the Association?”

Frank struggled to find a name for the makeshift collection of things the Humans were using. He couldn’t think of any better term to describe their ships, so he just stuck with the word fleet. He realized afterward that he should have used ‘recently constructed ships’.

Colok replied, “I have only heard what was reported in the official account; that the Humans attempted to kidnap the Associate Council and were thwarted.”

Colok paused and looked somewhat confused. He confessed, “I thought the why was already established. The Humans were trying to kidnap the Association Council and force them to negotiate a treaty or possibly eat them. Are you implying there is another reason for their attack?”

Frank responded, “I am not implying that. I am not sure if I am implying anything. I just wondered if you had heard any unofficial rumors about the event.”

“No,” Colok replied rather bluntly. “I have not.” He thought a moment and continued, “If you hear of anything let me know.”

The conversation was effectively over at that point. Frank profusely thanked the council member for his attention and wished him well in the next election. He then ended the call.

He considered calling a few of his other old friends still in politics, but eventually decided against it. If Colok didn’t know anything, then nobody else would either. Conversely, if Colok knew something and wasn’t willing to discuss it, then nobody else would either.

Frank had no idea how to proceed with his inquiry. His path for information had been effectively stymied. He needed a sign or a signal or even a message – something to spur on the investigation.

...You have a private message...

Frank excused himself and went into his study. He probably should have played it in front of his wife, but after years of life as a senator both had gotten used to this routine. He closed the door and said, “Computer, civilian level privacy screen, play message.”

...Hello. This is Becky O’Neal. My last name changed when I got married. Thank you for the update about Jenny Sledgehammer and for getting involved on her behalf. We tried to rescue Jenny from the military space station in Opron, but were too late. She had already been transferred to Hiricula when we arrived...

Wow, that simple sentence put the third battle of Opron in a whole new perspective. He mentally started to construct a series of alternative facts surrounding the attack. Clearly, the attack wasn’t random or a misconstrued attempt to kidnap government officials.

In (his new) reality, the attack was a well – conceived, desperate attempt to rescue a helpless victim from Hiriculan tyranny. Now, the reason they targeted the military space station made perfect sense; it was the most logical place that Jenny would be held. The stolen ovens and recipes still needed some clarification though.

He now knew exactly how to proceed. It was simple really – all he had to do was ask. He composed and sent a return message to Becky O’Neal. He then sent another to Admiral Solean. He then sent a message to Lexxi and a separate one to Carank.

In about a month he should have all of the answers he was seeking.