



"The Rise of the Alliance"

A "SF" Science Fiction Prequel story by Vanessa.

Introduction:

Is it within the essence of all things? The age-old played-out story, looping over and over, around and around, again and again and again...That battle between good and evil. We see it in history, culture, religion, nature, and everywhere that life seems to be. Species battling for life, for supremacy, to procreate, populate, dominate, to rise and to fall. With fate taking a hand every now and then to stir things up a bit.

They say that there are no new ideas, that nothing is new, it's all been done before and forgotten and done again. Is not every possibility played out in the vastness of time and space? Can something loop back on itself, re-occurring in different ways for time immemorial? What develops as mere fiction in one time and place, could yet be happening, or may one day occur, eons into the future, or the far flung past?

How could we have known that? How could we have prepared? Such things do not really happen do they?...

Prologue:

The year is 1982.

A young lad scampered downstairs into the lounge, he could still taste the toothpaste on his lips as he switched on the television and waited for it to warm up. A picture slowly appeared as he frantically punched button 3 on the remote control. A familiar tune was nearly over, but he hadn't missed anything, it was just beginning. Star Fleet, an amazing space adventure show, and one that he was desperately trying to watch without being noticed. The action began, laser torpedoes firing, lots of flashes and explosions, and a big red robot, cool!

Barely had he settled down, legs crossed on the sofa, cushion hugged to his chest when his mum burst in, "what are you doing watching the television on such a nice day!?" she boomed.

Then she glanced at the screen, "this is too young for you!"

Without further ado, amidst much protestations, she turned the TV off and dragged said child out of the lounge, pulling the cushion from his grasp.

"Now go and play with your brother outside" she snapped.

Just as she had turned off the picture, he had caught a glimpse of that strange, scary but somehow oh so very interesting character that so fascinated him. Sure, she was a "baddie", but as girls went, she seemed pretty cool, and quite a powerful if rather evil individual. Without really knowing why, he looked up to her, even though he knew it was wrong somehow. Thanks to the efforts of his mother, he never got to see much more of that show, he never knew how it all ended, but the seed had been sown.

As the years passed by, the memory faded but never quite disappeared, something had struck out for life and wasn't going to stop until it had won.

EP1:

There are species, more advanced than ours, that have made their presence felt upon the earth, many moons ago. For whatever reason, they chose, or were forced, to leave. There are clues of course, and the peoples around at the time did take heed of some of their most basic of methods. You only have to look into history to see ancient civilisations, distant ruins now, but well advanced for such times. How? Why? Who? Such questions are constantly asked by our historians. Is it all so easily explained away?

Scene 1:

The year is now 2000.

Mary Brady, a tall pale wiry woman, dressed in slightly gothic clothes, long brown hair flying about in the wind, skipped between the remains of the stony ruin she was excitedly examining. A session drummer by trade, she fancied herself as an amateur historian. She had always been fascinated by the ancients, the sophistication of the Greeks, the style of the Egyptians, the mystery of Atlantis and the lost Wonders, the treasures of the lost civilisations of the Americas. Indeed, as a tiny gesture of admiration, known only to her, she always did her eye make-up with a nod to the ancient Egyptians. A smile each morning as she remembered her secret homage.

Her own life had been a torrent of complexities, her mind still burning away, even now, under the surface. Is this really all there is? Not convinced by any religion, but maybe not quite a die-hard atheist either, she had yet to make her mind up about it all, and maybe she never would. Now, as she stood amongst the ancient ruins, fascinated by their very existence, and all the possibilities that that brings into her mind, darkness is out of immediate thought. But it would return, it always did. Is it depression? Or a madness of some kind? A defect in her makeup as a human? Some doctors had even diagnosed a type of schizophrenia. It was always a battle to keep it away, at bay, under wraps, out of sight. But inside, an indestructible beast growls, it wants to tear her apart, and everything around it, and no matter what Mary does, she cannot kill it.

Her friend, nay, her one time lover, The Captain, had known of this, but had proved to be the only one who could tame this beast. She always knew that the dashing Captain was special, how had this person coped with her violent self-destructive moods with seemingly a twisted alter-ego taking over, and known what to do? It was all beyond her. Tall, dark and handsome, he was the archetypal dream guy. She mused about the Captain's strange mutterings of not being from this earth, of being sent here to help her get better. And that they had done with some success, and Mary was still here after all that had happened. Yet the Captain was not with Mary any longer, the beast within her had lashed out again and again, and the poor Captain had eventually declared that it was not possible to help her fight her dark demons any longer. Although officially missing whilst flying a light aircraft, Mary secretly harboured thoughts that her Captain had actually gone back to the stars somewhere... No that was just silliness. "Don't think about it any more or you will just upset yourself again", she tried to tell herself. But in her heart she had loved him so, mysterious, distant, and so strong, oh how she missed him....Yet that other dark side of her felt victorious in sending him away.

Drying her eye she viewed the ruined Greek temple with interest, the detailed interest of a budding historian; How was it made, and why?

Her mind drifted again, as it was apt to do...

Mary had hated the drugs that the psychiatric doctors had prescribed, they made her feel like a zombie, so she refused to take them, even though this policy bought perils of it's own. She was trying to battle against her demons her own way. This was a risky business, she had gone out of control in the past. The demon inside trying to consume her whenever it could, and she had accepted death on so many occasions that it held little fear for her now.

Scene 2:

But at this precise moment all was well, her friend Pippa was with her and they were doing something that she felt was worthwhile and interesting. It would take her mind off the darkness within, and for now, it was.

As they climbed amongst the ruins, the huge pillars towered above, weathered and so extremely old, yet so well made. Such craftsmanship, Mary admired them, the few that remained standing were a testament to the ancients that had built them. She wondered how this had been done without any of the modern tools that are taken so much for granted now? What had this structure been all about really? She tried to imagine it in all its former glory, lost in times past for a moment, until Pippa shouted:

“Hey Mary! Come on sleepy head”.

“Coming Pippa!” Mary tried to say without any malice, she hadn’t been sleeping!

“The sun is starting to go down” Pippa quipped, not entirely unaware of Mary’s tone.

“Just a bit more then we’ll go”, said Mary, more pleasantly this time, and strode off towards an intriguing open line of sight, running through the ruins. Her mind, ever the inquisitor, was wondering what it was for. Pippa scrambled up to Mary and noted with mild dismay that she had got the bit between her teeth again. Pippa bit her lip and followed on behind, she knew how stubborn Mary could be.

The sun began to go down, a blazing ball of light, playing long shadows off the ancient temple ruins. It was still uncomfortably hot though, and the heat seemed to make Mary’s temper even quicker, causing Pippa to tiptoe about, trying not to incur too much wrath.

Mary got to a strange large round stone, seemingly lying at the end of the pathway, and patting it she turned and saw the sun dipping down behind the keystones lying on the tops of the remaining Grecian pillars. The beauty and yet mystery and dilapidated nature of the ruin overtook her, and a tear rolled down her cheek.

Her eyes closed and she was suddenly battling with her demons again. The darkness threatened to overcome her, and that part of her that was so gentle and feminine was suddenly afraid, and tears flowed. Without the Captain to help, the attacks were getting stronger. A flashback of her life blasted its way into her mind:

Scene 3:

She remembered being so consumed with negativity from such an early age. When had this started? She had often wondered. It was almost like another person would take over and push her out of the way. A dark and evil personality would come to the fore, and would exert a controlling influence over the way Mary’s life panned out. Back then, Mary had started life as a boy; A voice inside his head, a nagging persistent voice that had been there for as long as he could remember was trying to guide him, to tell him, to convince him, to push him towards a different path. Maddening and continuous, picking away, constantly suggesting that something was wrong. He had tried to bury himself in his love for music and rhythm, even getting good qualifications, he was no idiot. Yet still, the demon persisted, and he began to hate himself. The hatred would spill out, and love for others would wane. He had remembered watching a program on TV about a possible meteorite hitting the earth and thinking selfishly “Good! I hope it wipes everything out”. Such was the distain that was created when the darkness rose, boiling over like a black cauldron of contempt.

He had eventually surmised that the demon was caused by his total despise of his physical appearance. But had it been his own thoughts that had spurred him on to think that maybe he was really a woman, trapped in a man’s body? A dysmorphia, as it is known. Had he been guided down this path, or had it been the right thing to do all along? Such a though was not arrived at lightly, it had been there, distantly nagging away at him for years. Suppressed for so long, it had become entwined with the demon that wrought such loathing and despair. Surely it could be tamed, satiated, banished forever by him daring to let out the inner woman? As time had passed, he had slowly danced with this other woman, had he not become possessed by her? He gradually decided he needed her to banish his dark side once and for all. This was not a path to be taken lightly, but he became so stubborn and determined, that nothing, friends, jobs or loved-ones, would stand in his way. Thus Mary was born, or ushered forth into the light. Sure there was pain, inconceivable amounts of the stuff, but she fought through, and succeeded.

Remembering that feeling of finally winning out, of looking down at the new body she now had, full of wonderment and joy, she felt she had made the right decision, but had it been her decision? She sought courage

and made life her own. New friends and jobs came and went, no-one knew of her past. She was finally comfortable with her appearance, and standing, in the social and sexual world of men and women. But life was not perfect, you are what you are, and old skills and abilities run deep. She was finding out the hard way, how to make it in a man's world with the inherent lack of respect that men sometimes show women. She resolved to make them respect her, and some did, but she was still rankled by these new experiences. A dim and distant memory of a powerful female character, forcing her way in a male-dominated world seeped back into her mind. By using the singular power of possessing the abilities of both genders, she began to fight back, and got ahead because of these unique insights she had. To others, she appeared powerful, and not suffering of fools, needing things done her way, and stubborn to boot. A dragon even, but with a gentle heart... Yet the stability she craved was crumbling once again.

To her surprise and dismay, the darkness had not been banished, sure it had been subdued for a while, but it was returning, gaining power all the time. There was no loathing of her physical appearance this time around, her demonic alter ego sought mastery over it's new body.

Eventually this flip personality that had plagued Mary began testing her self control, and once again, the evil twin that had dominated her life threatened to take her over. Was this fate trying to right a wrong? Was it the ultimately misguided attempts of the Captain to keep Mary on the straight and narrow that were to blame? Sure, she was still alive, but was she just a ticking time-bomb, waiting to explode? The demon was hollowing her out from the inside, where had it come from? Or was it just that age-old fight between good and evil, playing itself out in such a terrible way within this poor mind? Maybe she was doomed whatever she did...

Scene 4:

Suddenly Mary snapped out of her flashback, Pippa was calling to her, "Hey are you OK?"

Mary thanked herself that Pippa was not close enough to see her tears, "I'm fine, just a bit overwhelmed by this whole place".

"I know what you mean, it's so amazing" said her short, blonde and bubbly friend.

A flash of contempt flew across Mary's mind as she thought "amazing? Is that all you can say", but she scotched the thoughts as best she could and got on with the task in hand of exploring the ruin just a little bit longer. The sun had dipped down even further as Mary examined the curious cylindrical stone, with it's own clearway through the ruin. There seemed to be a small, and very worn indentation in the top of the stone, in the centre of the flat topped cylinder. The stone was about 3 ft high, and Mary suddenly had an idea. Maybe just for fun, or to make a photo, or maybe it was something else that guided her hand, but she reached into her handbag and brought out a current favourite knick-knack she had been carrying around. Her bag was festooned with odd keyrings, charms, and little souvenirs of things she loved, it sometimes helped to keep the demons away. She could draw strength from them at times, and amongst these was a little photo-keyring she had created of an old character from her dim and distant childhood past whose strength she often wished for herself. Sure, not the ideal role model, but a powerful female figurehead nonetheless, whose bad-girl image had appealed to Mary's darker side.

She suddenly felt butterflies in her stomach, but had no idea why, as she took out a little resin figure of the Egyptian Cat goddess Bast from her capacious satchel. She had bought this recently while they were on a visit to see the sights of ancient Egypt.

The girls were on a tour of ancient landmarks from times past, it was Pippa's idea to help Mary keep her spirits up. Mary found the cat-shaped souvenir quite cute, and bought it out for photo opportunities whenever she felt so inclined. It appealed to her warped sense of humour, an Egyptian goddess at an ancient Greek temple ruin.

She took the resin figure, said to contain a "sacred" grain of sand from the ancient pharaohs lands, and popped it onto the top of the stone. She noted with surprise that the feet of the statue seemed to fit in the recess on the top of the stone quite well. "Look at that" she quipped to Pippa, "made to measure!".

Pippa was standing a few feet away but she could see the statue and giggled,

"Mary, this is Greece not Egypt".

But Mary's eyes were further afield, she had noticed that the sun was lining up with the pathway and looked like it would shine directly onto the stone. Now that would make a photo and a half, she thought, gesturing to Pippa to look at the sun's rays. Then suddenly she noticed the rock, partway down the path. It would block out the sun's direct line of sight just as it dropped below the hillside on which the temple stood. With uncharacteristic panic, added to her usual stubbornness, she suddenly rushed down the path, past a surprised Pippa, and attacked the rock, trying to move it with all her might. Now this lump of stone had been lying there for quite a while, and was not going to be brushed aside so easily.

"Come and help me move this" she snapped at Pippa.

"Hey, don't hurt yourself, that will never move, and you know it silly!" said Pippa in a surprised but surefast tone. Mary turned and gave Pippa one of her stares, and her rage began to boil over. "Why is she getting so angry over this silly rock?" thought Pippa. Mary barked at her again and Pippa reluctantly came over to help.

"We'll never move this you know".

"Put your back into it!"

Pippa suddenly became aware of an urgency in Mary she hadn't seen much of before, as she began straining like mad to nudge the rock out of the way. Mary was now purple in the face and Pippa began to worry that she would really hurt herself, but also knowing Mary's stubbornness, she decided that the best thing to do was to help and shut up.

Maybe it was the fact that Mary had once been a man in the distant past, that gave her an almost super-human strength at times, although you wouldn't think that looking at her. She was quite the looker, never struggling to catch a guy's eye if she cared, and sometimes if she did not. But whatever it was, the rock suddenly moved, at least enough to satisfy Mary and she ran back to the stone to catch the spectacle of light she was hoping for. Pippa collapsed back on the grassy bank, amazed that her friend had the stamina to seemingly move mountains, and spring into life without so much as a caught breath. As Mary reached the stone she turned and looked at the sun, as close as she dared. Breathlessness finally overcame her and she put both hands on the stone as she stood to the side to let the light play onto it.

Scene 5:

Had fate intervened again, was this the prodding that the universe needed, to play out that ancient battle over again?

It was that time, the sun lined up exactly with the carved out pathway, and shone on the ancient stone, in a way that had not been possible for centuries, as the ruined rock had blocked it's path. Had this been deliberate or not? Well, maybe we will never know, as events now unfolded at a great rate.

The single grain of sand deep within the resin of the statue, nay trinket, that had been placed upon the ancient altar took the heat from the stone below. A certain, invisible wavelength irradiated from the stone, and Mary felt it warm up astonishingly quickly, too quickly for normal in her mind. Pippa stared as she sat on the side of the bank, the stone almost glowed as the fiery redness of the sun illuminated it's old friend once more. A high pitched noise took Mary's eyes away from the spectacle of the sunlight as it shone along the pathway, concentrating it's rays as if it knew the drill from times of old.

Mary's stare was drawn to the resin statue, the sound seemed to be coming from that. It almost seemed to buzz, and then the cat figure melted away in an instant. Mary's jaw dropped as the grain of sand remained, suspended a couple of inches above the stone, and it sparkled through the colours of the rainbow, faster it went, until just white light remained. The white light grew outwards in all directions from the grain, engulfing the entire stone and an astonished yet transfixed Mary with it.

And then, in an instant, a bright flash of light and Mary was gone.

Pippa's stare was forced away by the intensity of the light, the earth shook and a piece of the ruin toppled and fell to the hard stone ground, splitting and throwing up fragments large and small as it did so. Pippa was struck on the head and was knocked unconscious, and then another much larger fragment landed in the middle of the pathway.

The sun was again denied it's sight of the special altar, and some tiny wisps of glass blew off the top of the stone, where the grain of sand had once been held.

Scene 6:

It was some time before a group of sightseers came across the crumpled near-lifeless body of Pippa. Not knowing what had happened, and no-one else being around, they took her back to the nearest hotel, where the medical services were called.

Maybe it was luck that she was deep in a coma, well, who would have believed her story anyway? Of Mary there was no trace, and this did achieve a small amount of publicity. A small tremor had been felt, the epicentre had indeed been the mountain where the old ruins were situated. But no other clues could be found, and without any testimony forthcoming from the only possible witness, Mary's disappearance was chalked up as yet another missing person. Her family distraught over the lack of ability, in their eyes, of the Greek authorities to mount a sufficiently thorough investigation.

EP2:

Scene 7:

It was the first real conquest of a fledgling power, the destruction of the Altarians. The Imperial Master knew that this was his first real outwardly visible test of his rule. Yes it was going well, but not as he would have liked. The ancient Thalian had, in his impatient eyes, sat about and done oh so little for demi-parsecs, or so it seemed to the ambitious upstart. He observed the battle through the eyes, or rather implants of his minions, with some disdain. They lacked battle tact, and were it not for sheer numbers, a victory would not have been so forthcoming.

He fancied himself as a master tactician, yet his commanders did not seem to have the right instinct, or even ruthlessness, for his liking. His patience was wearing thin as one commander requested the use of the really heavy artillery, the Imperial Delta Laser.

Now, he had originally hoped, somewhat naively admittedly, to be able to exert a certain degree of rule via simple light touches through the implants and cyborg technology that was so apparent in it's widespread execution, due to it's disfiguring nature on the hosts. He was beginning to realise that the complete domination he so craved, a galactic peace through tyranny if you like, would need the application of some large amounts of good old-fashioned fear. "DELTA LASER?!" he roared, "YOU IMPUDENT FOOL! Why must you fall back on these last resorts? It is because you are incompetent!"

"Sorry great Master, they are putting up quite a fight..."

"SILENCE! I will allow the use of the Delta Laser this time, but only to spare myself any more of your pathetic excuses!"

"Thank you Master, by your divine guidance".

Scene 8:

Later, as the full horror of the battle subsided, the harvesters landed on the planet Altar. Their main purpose was to gather up defeated Altarians, that were not too injured, for bionic implant conversion. Thereby creating more soldiers for the Thalian attack forces. However, this task was not going too well, as the use of the Delta Laser had rendered most of the planets' inhabitants well beyond the stage where bionic implants could usefully be applied. Now in most races, this might not have been the calamity it sounded, as victorious forces can usually bank on a replenishment of troops through their own planet's species. Not so the Thalian, they were of quite a different race...

Scene 9:

Their history is almost as long as that of the stars themselves. Information is scarce, but that which is known is thus:

A small race, nay, more a group of beings that consisted of raw energy, drawn to a planet that is by its very composition, a giant accumulator of energy. Consisting of rare elements that combine to store the nuclear forces present in suns, yet with an almost total 100% conservation of this deadly power. Its very composition being seemingly unique in the galaxy. Some believe that the Thalian elders are simply the energy of pure evil, drawn to such a place by it's unique characteristics. Whatever the case, countless Terra-parsecs may have passed before other civilisations became aware of their presence. It is said that an unfortunate ship, the first to approach the Thalian planet, was crewed by the very first lifeforms to be consumed by these energy beings. Legend has it that the bodies of the unfortunate crew became the first non-ethereal vessels for the ancient presences to possess. The technology of their ship was manipulated into implants which allowed the bodies to live beyond their years. As these host bodies were organic in nature, over time, their deterioration led the Thalian to contrive ever more complex bionic implants, in order to sustain and control their hosts for as long as possible.

Countless demi-parsecs later, it was not improbable that other craft may approach the Thalian planet, and a similar fate awaited them also. Thus the Thalian were able to exist in the physical, albeit without the means to increase their numbers by any biological means. As time passed, the planet Thalian slowly absorbed more energy, and one or two Elders began to dwindle in their motivation to stay in the physical plane, and so abandoned their

disintegrating bodies and were taken down into the planet's mantle. Once there, they could renew their energies, but with no hosts available, became trapped in the ever-increasing energy of the core.

A large meteorite crashed into the planet, whilst this did not cause any harm to any remaining Thalian, it did give some raw materials for them to work with. Thus it was that the elders tried in vain to exist in the rocks of the meteorite. The lack of manipulable organic tissue or technological implants were what was causing all the problems. However, when combining the rocks with some of the planet's own special material, it became possible to add bionic implants and build a body from metal and rock. This new vessel had far more capability to store energy, due to its very composition. A brief battle took place for possession of this new body, with disastrous consequences. One Thalian life-force won out, banishing the others to an eternity trapped in the core of the planet. Thus the Imperial Master was created, from sheer evil, and raw energy, with a mastery of technology thrown in for good measure.

This was, however, a long time ago, and the Master had to bide his (it's) time gathering energy and snatching ships out of the space round his planet whenever he could. Thus a race of second-generation Thaliens were created, taking shape from various organic beings, disfigured, (enhanced as the Master liked to think) with controlling technology and bionic implants. The better of these beings were given a more direct connection to the Master, as the total numbers grew, with rank and file gradually appearing.

Thus the Thalian "race" was created as it were.

Fast forward another Terra-parsec or so, and the impatient Master begins his Imperial conquest of the galaxy. Each absorbed species passing on technology and weapons and growing the whole into an unholy Alliance, the Imperial Alliance as it became known, with the evil Imperial Master as the untouchable God-like being in overall command of it all.

Scene 10:

The Master had studied the many battles as his troops ranks burgeoned, and realised that more and more control of the overall running of the Alliance would need to be delegated to an elite group of beings. Thus the Imperial Executive Council was formed. The Master craved for more power, and quashed any real signs of independent thought in the Council, as soon as it surfaced. The policy of fear and overall mind control was stifling and at the same time all encompassing. It was not too long in the general scheme of things, for the time to arrive when enough troops were available to start to consider large-scale off-planet attacks of other worlds. Pity those planets that had the unlucky distinction of simply being close to Thalian to warrant an attack. The Master knew that his greatest weapon was fear, and he knew that a cohesive and well-disciplined force was essential. But also an identity was needed, not just a rag-tag collection of controlled beings.

Large-scale plants were constructed to convert the lowest ranks into massed armies of line-produced soldiers. Whatever organic being that existed on the inside, the outside became optimised as the Imperial Alliance soldier, and the name Termoid was coined as being sufficiently base as to be a threat to upper ranks of what they might become if orders were not carried out, whilst conveying a sufficient theme of quashing any individuality that the original beings may have had.

It was said before that the Master was born of pure evil, and so has only the emotions of such a being. Not only did he not possess any positive emotions like goodness, charity, love and caring, he went to quite some lengths to remove any such emotions from his subjects. The main downside to this was that emotions such as rage and fear and hatred were complimented by cowardice, deception and depression.

Fear, and pain were the main tools used by the Master, and direct control if necessary through his powers of mind manipulation.

Scene 11:

And so to the latest battle...

The lack of suitable organic matter on Altar to harvest for new Thalian soldiers did not go unnoticed by the Master. The Executive Council were also aware of this, the Master made sure of it. He summoned them to his mighty chamber, and as they gathered he towered over them, they seemed like mice to him.

“You fools! Where are my new soldiers? That useless rock we just conquered has taken more than it has given!”

“Master, we will do better next time” ventured a brave council member.

“DO BETTER!?, You will DIE!”, and with a bolt of blue energy from the Master’s hand, the unfortunate Council member screamed out as his link with the Master was severed, followed by the cessation of all functions of his implants. The connections severed, he lost all control of his bionic limbs and collapsed to the floor. Unable to breathe or function, he died a slow death, as he had become so dependent on the bionic implants to extend his lifespan.

The rest of the council looked on in horror as their compatriot quivered on the floor.

“Who is next?!” boomed the Master.

No sound was made, other than the incessant background chirping of the Termoids as they went about their duties almost autonomously.

“Dismissed!” Snapped the Master, and with a gesture, the council scattered like frightened mice.

He pondered his position, growing the Alliance without losing control was going to be more of a challenge than he thought. He began to wish he had the Thalian elders to consult. As a being of evil, he was also a being of superstition, he knew that there was a force for good in the galaxy, and it would eventually make it’s presence felt. As yet he had no idea at all where or when. He needed to consult a seer, he needed sight of what the future held, he felt sure he could then manipulate it to his advantage.

EP3:

Scene 12:

The Thalian attack on planet Altar had not gone unnoticed. Many millions away, on Planet Esper, the planet of Mystics, the ruling Pizaree royal family had feared the day that evil would rear its ugly head. It had long been supposed that the Gelmar Capacitor (Esperian name for the planet Thalian) would hold the forces of evil at bay, confining them to its boundaries. They had not counted upon the antics of the Imperial Master. Maybe complacency had taken hold? What is for sure is that the many Terra-parsecs of relatively threat-free existence had caused a great many Esperians to begin to fool themselves that such a status quo would exist indefinitely. But those of the highest knowledge and social order knew deep down that this would not be the case forever.

Amongst a planet of mystics, the position of Seer ranked quite highly, obviously. Someone with such an ability to see beyond the k-parsecs of generations, on a planet where the mental arts were so well advanced was valued almost beyond all else. Even in a caring, sharing society such as that on Esper. The etiquette of daily life was not to pry into another's thoughts, the consequences could be appreciated here quite easily!

Even the great foresight of the Seers was not all-seeing, and the events on Thalian were not clear to those on Esper until Altar had fallen. A meeting of the royal family was called, and the Seer was summoned to try to give guidance on future events. Any prediction that an Esperian Seer makes is not literal in its meaning, it must be interpreted with skill and experience. The Pizaree were considered the most suitable for such an esteemed task. Also, much pain can be felt by the Seer, if the prediction is particularly unfortunate.

Scene 13:

At the royal palace, atop the peak of Esper's largest spread (city) Esperalia, a beautiful white marble floor stretched out from the lower balcony to the Seer's seat. Green mountains glistened with cloudy peaks in the distance, the sound of a waterfall crept gently through the air. In so much as air and water were slightly different to that on earth, but the comparisons could be drawn. The King and Queen sat and gave the Seer a royal audience, respectful, patient, hopeful. The Seer had a long white beard, and a green tight-fitting hat, with a single golden coloured ball at the top of it, with matching green satin-like robe. Esperians were humanoid in appearance, if not in genetic make-up. As he appeared from within the hallowed walls of the palace, a hush immediately befell the awaiting court. He slowly made his way to the revered marble seat, where every Seer from times past had sat, his age slowing his movements down to an agonisingly gradual pace. As he got to his marble perch, with a flourish he flicked his green robe forwards and took his place on that special seat. A pause then followed, the gathered Esperians could almost taste the tension as they waited for their great elder to speak.

His brow furrowed, pain was sensed, and suddenly the court fell deathly silent. Everyone could sense that there was bad news, within his mind the Seer feared that the pain may worsen. Suddenly he spoke in hushed tones; He told of: "A distant planet where a race existed, a humanoid race, from whence a great darkness would come, fashioned by evil itself into the messenger of destruction of the galaxy."

The Seer paused, trying to cope with the pain of this terrible prediction: "But wait, there is more, this same world will later harbour the salvation of all" he announced, trying to focus on this positive foretelling. Alas, sensing the impending destruction of Esper in his thoughts, the Seer collapsed, unconscious, before he could tell any more.

The King dismissed the court with a mere thought.

Courtiers rushed to help the Seer, and carried him away to rest in a private royal room.

He was laid on a bed, covered with the large creamy petals of the Jujuba flower, Esper's national symbol. Its delicate scent is said to calm and soothe.

Scene 14:

The King paced up and down outside the recovery room of the Seer. The Queen contacted him, "My dear are you well?"

"Yes", thought the King with uncharacteristic brevity.

"Sorry m'lord, I will not disturb further" she replied.

“This is the news I was dreading, yet always knew would come”, came the King’s more open reply.

“My dear, we must find out more about this planet, I have a feeling we will need the help of it’s people”, he continued.

Could he dare get any more information from the Seer? Would this cause irreparable damage, or even death? No, he must wait and bide his time. His thoughts turned to his people, they must be informed.

Scene 15:

On a planet such as Esper, news travels fast, but even mystics can succumb to a few Chinese Whispers, and so the King had created Royal Announcement Days. These were usually a celebration, across the whole kingdom, whereby the King would announce an important event, or maybe a Seer’s prediction. Thus everyone would get the correct version of the story, without anyone’s artistic licence getting too carried away! Bright banners and flags would usually festoon public places, none more so than the square at the Royal Palace. However, on this occasion, there was no such finery. As subjects gathered, in halls, parks and squares, they chatted nervously to each other. The noise unusual, yet comforting to the gathered masses.

Scene 16:

Midia held her mother’s hand, in support, and also to get support herself.

“What could it be”, she mused to the tall brunette be-robed lady beside her.

“We will know soon enough my dear”, came the gentle reassuring reply.

Midia had just turned 18, and her powers were starting to mature. Strangely on Esper, a quirk of fate meant that their years were not much longer than those on Earth. Maybe a centi-parsec more, but close enough for comparisons to be made. She knew she should not pry into others’ thoughts, but the temptation was there nonetheless. They had travelled to the nearby hall to hear the news, their own dwelling being rather remote. The closeness of so many people made Midia all the more curious as to what they were thinking. Suddenly, as if there in person, the King appeared in their minds, and silence took over the assembled gentle-folk.

“Subjects of Esper, your King requests your attention”.

As the King began to relay the Seer’s prophesy, Midia went cold. What could possibly harm the idyllic life that they led? How could there be creatures who would bring terror and destruction to such a peaceful planet? She did not understand, how could she, having been so shielded from it all, especially in their remote farm. Her and her mother had led a peaceful if not idyllic life there, in her young eyes, and she was full of life and yearning to see more of the world now that she was a grown up.

The message over, and with unusual lack of control, the air was filled with thoughts, worried thoughts. Midia picked up on them, she could not resist it. Her mother Imila noticed the look on her child’s face and immediately wiped away the thoughts buzzing around Midia’s head, with the experience of one more adept at the mystical arts.

“Midia, do not allow yourself to be drawn into a panic”, she calmly but firmly told her daughter.

“Sorry Mother, I am scared”.

“Now now, you heard the King, there was good news too, there will always be good forces to counteract the bad. We must concentrate our efforts into supporting the good spirits, they will protect us”.

“Yes mother”, said Midia diligently, she still put so much faith into her elders, her innocence was every bit as beautiful as the pretty Jujuba petals that were such a part of life on Esper.

Whilst Imila was partially correct when she comforted her daughter about the good spirits protecting the meek of the Galaxy, little did she know that a great many terrible things would play out over the coming k-parsecs, before peace would eventually reign once more.

Scene 17:

As Midia and Imila journeyed back to their homestead, Midia looked out into Esper’s beautiful sky, the three moons were slowly appearing and the blue/red haze of nightfall was beginning to take hold. She seemed immune to it’s beauty, trying to focus her mind on the openness of space, wondering who these patrons of doom were. She

could not imagine any act of malice, there was no malicious speck in her body, how could they hate her so? Could she maybe reason with them? Show them the beauty of Esper that she knew so well?

Scene 18:

“Be careful what you wish for Midia”, another distant thought picked up on her mind’s wanderings, Midia though, was totally oblivious to this...

Some millitons away, a face not seen on Esper for many k-parsecs had been monitoring the proceedings with much interest. Even now his sleek ship was speeding homeward, back to this very planet that he had missed so much, and he was so desperate to see his son again. The dashing Captain Corliss making good hyperspeed towards a homeworld that would soon need his outspoken opinion, in the face of countless Demi-parsecs of peaceful complacency. A complacency that Corliss had always warned against. He sensed the very balance of power of the galaxy was shifting from good to evil, and he planned to take the fight right to these dark forces. He smiled as Esper began to show on his advance sensor screens.

“Home soon” he yearned.

EP4:

Scene 19:

Soldier 14911 observed the advanced mode attack screens, emotionlessly the Termoid carried out its task of surveying the approaching planet. Suddenly the screens went blank, 14911 chirped with immediate confusion “What do we do now, what do we do now?”, and a chorus of similar voices bleated out their dismay.

“Hold position!” came the snappy reply. Captain Epsilon then swung round to observe his superior, Commander Maren gripped the balcony rail on his command lectern, a grey 7-fingered hand drumming the smooth metallic rail. His remaining bland yellow organic eye almost winced, just momentarily, then he drilled “Shields Up you idiot!”

“Shields up!” relayed Cptn Epsilon.

“Shields up, shields up”, retorted the Termoids, their red eyes flickering.

After the debacle of Planet Altar, Maren was not going to be so hasty with the “Delta Laser”. His implant ever-present over his other two eyes, relaying information to superiors as he looked upon the events unfolding. He felt so constrained in his actions, wanting to lash out at the new foes, but fearing for retribution from the Imperial Master, or one of his Council.

The screens flickered back into life, the shields somehow preventing whatever it was from jamming them, yet now the range was much reduced, and Maren did not like being so blind.

“Ready attack fleet”, he quipped, almost uncertain of his own reasoning.

“C’mmdr, should we not ascertain our foe before committing carriers and fighters?” Piped up Epsilon.

The tension was getting to Maren, and he erupted at Epsilon, trying to move some of his pent-up fear onto the unfortunate captain, “Do NOT question my orders!”

“By your divine guidance” came the reply, Epsilon carefully trying to appease his Commander, even though he did not agree with him.

The sides of the ship opened, and disgorged the evil masses, towards a fate unknown. As they flew off, contact became difficult with their home cruiser.

“Follow them in” came the order.

“By your divine guidance” said Epsilon, trying to hide his apprehension.

Suddenly they were under attack!

“Evasive manoeuvres!” barked Maren.

Explosions battered the ship, as Maren became paralysed by the fear of retribution if he failed. The ship shook, and reflexes took over, his screens were phased by interference, was his force being annihilated?

“Retreat!” he yelled,

Epsilon was about to relay the order when a huge explosion wracked the ship. He was thrown to the floor, the hull was breached, the damaged side doors unable to open to let the remaining fighters and carriers back in.

The last thing that Maren felt was pain, but whether it was the destruction of his ship, or a final retribution from the Imperial Master he would never know.

Scene 20:

The bitter taste of defeat was new to the Imperial Master, and he was not magnanimous in defeat. He raged at the Executive Council. “Two cruisers destroyed, two damaged, what is the meaning of this?”

No explanation was forthcoming, each council member knew that if they spoke first, they would surely die. But their thoughts betrayed them, his link to each through the implants into their various cortexes meant that they had nowhere to hide. They were all thinking much the same, a superior and unknown force had repelled them back. Lack of advance information, and indecisive Commanders seemingly baulked by their own fear and inhibitions had led to the defeat. If only to satisfy his own need for revenge, the Imperial Master scooped up an unfortunate Executive Council member and crushed them like a bug, in one of his enormous talon-like hands. Yet

even this did not bring him much satisfaction. He became absorbed in his own thoughts, and the remaining council members slipped away.

Scene 21:

A more devious approach was needed he surmised. Such arrogance with a still fledgling force was not necessarily the right approach. He desperately needed intel, maybe a spy would help? Momentarily he connected to his officers, and viewed the massed ranks of the Thalian forces as they went about their duties. Hmm, he could not imagine any one of them being able to blend into the background in any civilisation, except perhaps another Thalian one! No, that was not the Alliance' way, sneaking about. His arrogance refused to permit further such thoughts, but maybe an advance unit to kidnap a suitable subject for interrogation would be a more effective way of gathering information...?

One of the plus points about assembling an entire planet's worth of armies, from as varied a gene pool as possible, is that it does throw up a goodly number of technologies that can be assimilated into the Alliance's own arsenal. The failed attack on the ferocious planet Thalide, had been an arrogant move, but it had revealed some points for the Imperial Master to ponder over. One of these was the apparent vulnerability of the Alliance capital ships, another was the difficulty of trying to operate from a planet-base. A movable base would be more useful. The third point was something that the Master had been pondering very reluctantly for a while. There was a fine trade –off between giving his Commanders a free enough rein to act with intuition, skill and relative independence of his control without letting them run amok. And the disaster of Altar had brought home to him that too much free rein was not a good thing. Yet again, the crushing defeat at the hands of the aggressive Thaldians had shown that Commanders afraid to attack, and barred the independence of mind needed for quick battle tactics were equally as useless. Maybe a better version of implant was required, especially for his commanders, something more independent, a Symbiont maybe? He decided to tackle the problem of poor capital ships first, and he had the raw materials to do it. Through his mind links to his subjects, he was able to locate the engineers and designers that he needed.

Scene 22:

Design Engineer Boride had struggled to accept his implant initially. Whilst he was no fighter, he did have an independent mind. It was what had made him such a good designer on his home world. He had had little recall of the Alliance attack, being in his lab working away on something or other. He did remember the pain of the implant though. But as an engineer, he had always sought to improve upon things, and the much enhanced vision and processing powers the implant gave him access to, quickly became second nature to him. He remembered the early days of Alliance rule, of being allowed so little independent thought, so much so that he had almost lost his previous identity. He was glad the leash had been relaxed somewhat.

Scene 23:

Councillor Apalat had summoned a group of the best engineers and designers to a meeting at the Executive Council's chambers, deep within the Imperial Alliance base.

Trying to project an image of power, Apalat used a tone of voice that he hoped would instil fear in his minions and also impress the Imperial Master, "Our Master demands the creation of a new breed of Alliance battle cruisers", he shrilled.

The assembled mass, Boride amongst them, listened intently.

One of the distinct advantages of the Imperial Alliance implants was the adoption of a single language. Whatever each subject thought, spoke or heard, was run through the implant and immediately translated into the Alliance own tongue.

"Your task is to create such a ship, there can be no failure here, you all know the consequences of that!"

Boride had long had an idea of using the organic/technology interface, or cyborg-based systems that the Alliance had so well developed on it's subjects, to create such a ship. He could hold himself no longer "Councillor, an organic ship of huge proportions would lend itself to a ready made hull and superstructure for us to implant".

“Whaaat!?, a ship of flesh? Idiot! I want proper ideas...”Apalat was cut short.

The Imperial Master’s hologram flashed before the assembled group. Searing pain burned into Apalat’s mind, as the Master silenced him with the merest thought to the councillor’s implant.

“Continue!” he growled at Boride.

Clearly taken aback by this, the flustered Boride choked back his fear, and concentrated on his implant’s impassive clarity of control. “The Kathaar Fish of the Orid sector would provide such a hull for our ships”, he quivered, realising he had not mentioned anything about divine guidance.

“Hmm, interesting” mused the Master.

“You will pursue this idea, I do not need to remind you of the consequences of failure”.

“By your divine guidance” simpered Boride.

Scene 24:

So it came to pass that an elite force of Alliance ships were sent to the Orid sector, luckily only 500 Millitons or so from the Thalian home planet. The Kathaar were an ancient marine lifeform, they lived fairly inert lives on the scattered small moons in the lower quadrant of the Orid zone. A zone full of varied marine life forms due to the many oceanic moons that existed there. The Kathaar were, however, so huge that they had no predator of any kind, and slowly moved about the oceans, combing up the debris of the seas to satisfy their huge appetites. A good comparable species might be Whales, however, the Kathaar were not mammalian in any way, and so very much larger than the largest Whale species. An alliance attack was so easy on these gentle creatures, and once beached, a process dreamt up by Boride allowed their thick skins to become the ideal hulls of a deadly ship. Even so, it was a huge undertaking, and only about 6 of these graceful creatures could be towed back to the Thalian zone for further fitting out as Imperial battle cruisers.

Scene 25:

Such plundering of the peaceful galaxy of these ancient lifeforms did not go unnoticed though...

The Imperial Master cast his net wider in search of worlds to conquer. Choosing a different sector to that where Thalide lay, meant going out another 250 Millitons or so, and he worried about stretching his forces so weakly. Therefore a scout group was sent out to give the Master sight of easier targets, to swell their ranks with troops, and provide a few more planet’s worth of raw materials for manufacturing his machines of war. He was lucky in that aggressors were few and far between, the complacency of Demi-parsecs of peace meant easy pickings. The next two worlds fell easily, and one was so rich in minerals and metals that it gave the Master an idea. With his energy link to his own home planet seemingly secure, he needed a mobile fortress planet to spearhead attacks further afield. Thus the planet Amarissee was literally torn apart by Termoids and construction machinery to create the very symbol of the inevitable doom that the Imperial Alliance sought to dish out across the galaxy:- The Imperial Master’s own fortress planet.

Scene 26:

As the latest captured beings were being “united” with their implants, the technology had advanced as the Thaliens began to perfect it. Microscopic nanites were now being used to prolong life, remove disease, and process food (fuel) intake in ever more economic ways. Greater uploading of knowledge to Imperial databanks was allowing the Master the foresight he so craved. And such a gem was turned up, a planet of Mystics, within which lay the very Seer information he so craved.

“This is it!” he roared.

“I must have this information” he blasted at an attendant Council member.

“Assemble a force to kidnap a suitable being from this planet”, he commanded to the Councillor.

“By your divine guidance”

The very wheels of fate were turning once again...

EPS:

Scene 27:

The blue/red haze of night began to fade as another day dawned on Esper. Folk went about their daily lives, oblivious of the impending doom. For a planet of Mystics, this was not a situation that could last.

The King was becoming so frustrated, he knew that a terrible carnage had taken place on a distant world. The highest order of Esperians sensed the plundering and slaughter of an ancient race, the Kathaar.

Yet this terrible act had also spurred the activity of the Seer once more.

Scene 28:

Midia had had a fretful sleep, whilst her own powers of telepathy were still in their infancy, she longed to know more of the space beyond Esper's borders. Nightmares of cataclysmic destruction of her own world, did not allow her gentle mind to rest. She must know more. But she needed an excuse for a little trip out. To get away from the homestead for a brief while, maybe she could use her fledgling powers to satiate her yearning for input? As fate would have it, such a diversion was about to fall straight into Midia's lap.

In another room, her mother cried out in pain. Midia rushed to her mother's aid, "Mother what is it, are you hurt?" Always the independent, Imila had steadfastly strode through her life, doing things her own way. Her husband and father to Midia had tragically died many centi-parsecs ago, and she had fought to bring her daughter up on her own. Indeed much of this stubbornness had imbued itself within Midia.

"I'm alright my dear, I have hurt my foot", she said sitting and clutching her left foot.

"I just dropped something on it that's all".

Midia looked, and saw the large box of farm produce on the floor, Tuberfruit scattered about the room. Her mother had been doing too much again.

"Mother you should really ask me to help you".

"Yes Midia, but should I really have to ask...?"

"Er, well.." fidgeted Midia, then an idea sidled into her head: "I know, I'll collect our goods from the epicary (Esperian equivalent to shop), so you can relax".

"Well, yes, you are old enough now", her mother ruminated. "Alright then, but please be careful!"

"Yes mother" Midia thought to her as she took her mini-glider from the storage room.

She was glad her mother had observed the Esperian courtesy of privacy of thought, now she was a "grown-up", as she flicked the power switch on the mini-glider. Looking much like a large scooter, but with no wheels, the unit hummed and hovered into life. Midia jumped on and sped away down the track towards the city...

Gathering victuals was not her only concern on this journey, but she took care to guard her own thoughts as best she could. Had she been under 18, she may not have got away with such a scheme, her mother would most likely have detected Midia's ulterior motives in offering to go on this "errand".

Scene 29:

Maybe because the king was so tense and worried, he was less than careful in his usual arrangements for privacy, as the brave Seer agreed to another prediction attempt. He was more urgent in his preparations this time, and there was less notice given to Royal courtiers of the impending proceedings. But the King had to know more about this race the Seer had mentioned. He knew it was of the utmost importance, and he was right, although he had little idea of just how important that distant race was going to be...

Scene 30:

Midia grabbed the pack of goods her mother had ordered, negotiations were not needed at the epicary, she let the Keeper know her intentions. Whilst she was polite, she did not hang around to talk as she had been apt to do in the past. The Keeper scratched his chin as she left the premises, she was 18 now and so he was bound to abide by the privacy code, but he sensed something was not right.

Midia stuffed the goods into the baggage receptacle on the mini-glider. Excitedly she leapt on and with a flourish, she sped off, the antigrav kicking up a small plume of dust as she disappeared. She was not going home, she was

headed into Esperalia. Her destination was the park close to the royal palace, there she hoped to try and eavesdrop on the palace goings on, and try to find out more about, well, everything she knew she should not know. She glid unnoticed into the park, and positioned her mini-glider behind a bush. Switching off the power, the scooter sank to the ground. She was not worried about her mother's parcel of milli-parsec's supplies, as crime was generally unheard of on Esper. She hitched up her flowing blue skirt and scampered up the bank, edging as close as she dared to the walled gardens of the palace.

Scene 31:

The Seer took his place upon the marble seat, he was afraid of what he was about to do, yet he knew the information he might be able to glean was of the utmost importance to his race. The King watched, this time the Queen was not present, she was elsewhere, visiting a doctor.

The Seer's brow once again furrowed with concentration, he was as careful as he could to look at aspects of his prophesy that would give him the least pain. He began to talk, as boldly as he dared, the memory of the previous experience ever present in his mind.

"A race, far distant from here, visited once, many k-parsecs ago by the Athenians. A race since devoid of contact with all but their own, where good and evil are ever present". He paused, anticipating pain at any moment.

"Great men, for that is their being, will come to harbour the saviour, the saviour of us all".

He stopped, fearing the next turn as he connected with his ancient and passed down ability once again.

The King was on the edge of his seat, it was the bad news he craved so much.

"A battle already rages, but here good is weak, and evil is amassing it's forces, just as we wish for a saviour, so do they". The Seer leapt upright and froze!

He was trying to utter something. The King broke with protocol and vaulted over the balcony wall and ran towards the Seer. A burning image of an angel of death scorched itself into the Seer's mind.

"Makara", the word almost choked him as he uttered it, then the King just managed to catch his old friend as the Seer fell, limp and cold, to the ground.

Scene 32:

Midia panicked, she suddenly ran, stumbling over her flowing skirt as she did so. She had done a bad thing, she had plundered the Seers' thoughts, and she wished she had not. In a blind panic she fumbled for the mini-glider's power switch. Clicking into life it hovered momentarily before she was away, riding like the wind. Onlookers caught out by it's erratic procession through the park, jumped out of it's way. She had to get away, had to get home, why oh why had she been so curious.

Scene 33:

Imila was beginning to wonder where her daughter had got to when she heard a thump. Midia was back, she dumped the box of victuals on the table, items rolling out everywhere. Saying "Here you are mother", before heading off to her room. Imila heard the door slam "blam!", then peace again reigned.

"Teenagers!" she muttered, "same the planet over I guess".

How right she was...

Scene 34:

Later that night, if poor Midia had sought to banish her nightly demons, then she was in for a surprise. A new figure haunted them now, there was a terrifying sense of hatred, as a sword wielding redheaded witch cackled while hacking through that park towards Midia's dream-world figure, where she was crouched by the palace wall, again and again and again...

EP6:

Scene 35:

A student at the newly formed, peaceful, Earth Defence Force academy, engineering and future technology (quite a mouthful) sat at his desk, momentarily distracted from his learning chores by thoughts of distant worlds yet to be explored. Cadet Hagen yearned for adventure, yet possessed an amazing engineering skill beyond his years. As a child he remembered the devastating yet crude space war III that had raged through his home planet and also across the space closest to earth, with such basic ships. How fast technology had come on in such a short time. Human history had shown time and again that technology advances so quickly in wartime. This time however, the destruction wrought upon the earth and its cultures was truly globally devastating. The surviving powers were forced to combine their resources to prevent the total annihilation of humans as a species. Thus the EDF had been formed, as much to defend the earth in its current weakened post-war state as to unite the cultures and avoid any possibility of Space War IV happening.

Scene 36:

In the amphitheatre below, a figure of some authority was about to speak to the assembled new cadets. Lieutenant General Kyle stood in the lecture pulpit, his brown hair showing the signs of grey that belied a wealth of experience in war, and the pain and suffering it brought.

“Cadets, you are amongst the first of a new hope for peace, the future of the earth and the success of the EDF is soon to be entrusted in your hands. You must prove yourselves in study, either through academia or military skills, to be granted the huge mantle of responsibility that waits to be laid upon your young shoulders”.

Hagen’s attention was drawn to this figure of establishment, whose voice was at once captivating in its authority and great sense of righteousness, yet also conveying a caring nature that drew a feeling of deep trust in Cadet Hagen. Here was someone to really respect. Lt. Gen. Kyle continued:

“I am personally counting on each and every one of you to commit yourselves fully to your studies. I cannot stress how important your contributions will be towards the establishment of a new force to protect and police our brave new world. The force of Star Fleet is at the core of what the EDF stands for, its pledge for unity, defence, advancement and above all, peace!”

Scene 37:

The auditorium roared with applause, Cadet Hagen felt an amazing feeling of warmth, anticipation and excitement as he mingled with the swarms of young men and women as they made their way out into the great halls of residence at the EDF academy. “Wow, Star Fleet” he couldn’t help but blurt out to himself.

“Yes, quite exciting isn’t it?” said a tall slender blonde-haired woman.

Hagen glanced at her badge, and noticed with some glee that she was also a cadet, from the future technology school, like him.

“I’m Annalee H’ari” she beamed.

“Hagen, Sub., Subaru Hagen” he blurted back.

“Pleased to meet you Subaru, I see we are to be classmates”.

“Y-yes, we are”, he stuttered.

“What an amazing speech that was by Lt. Gen. Kyle!” she coo-ed.

“Indeed”, said Subaru, “He’s quite a speaker”.

“I’m glad we agree, I’m majoring in the psychological effects of space habitation”, she proudly stated.

Subaro, gaining some confidence, took his chance to talk about his studies: “I’m hoping to work on advanced weaponry and defence systems”, he said. Annalee tried to stifle the slight wince that threatened to spread throughout her face upon the mention of the word “weaponry”. Why were men so bound up in such concerns? She momentarily mused.

“We must meet up for coffee sometime”, she smiled.

“Yes, that would be nice”, said Subaru. In his head he cringed “nice?!”, was that the best he could do?

Annalee snapped her heels together in a half salute and strutted away, "He's cute" she thought, "Got to see some more of him"...

Subaro watched her stride away, "I hope I can think of something better to say the next time I see her" he thought.

Scene 38:

The Imperial Master impatiently brooded as he monitored with intent, an elite special force slowly take shape. The Imperial Alliance was beginning to abound with powerful battle cruisers, with their attendant carrier ships and swarms of fighters, but this mission required something a little more subtle. A special ship, a small, fast, yet well armed craft to carry out a special ambush and kidnap assignment. The information he had torn with such exaction, from those poor souls unfortunate to become fodder for the bionic implant procedures that are so driving the Alliance as a whole, was sketchy to say the least. He now knew of the existence of the planet of mystics, but it's location would prove more elusive. A hand-picked team of upcoming soldiers was something the Master could take more direct involvement in.

Scene 39:

Captain Keyro felt a strong presence wash over him. His implant glowed red, it was a long slender snake-like appendage that began in a single red eye over his own right hand oculus, and swept up and over the top of his head, it's tail running down his neck. It made him look particularly fearsome. He had grown quite proud of it, and also the two bionic tentacles that replaced two of his own, giving him a particularly contrived 50/50 cybernetic appearance. Perhaps it was his ready acceptance of such otherwise horrific alterations that put him above others in being looked favourably upon by his superiors.

He could feel the Imperial Master's voice ripple through his implant.

"Keyro, I am choosing you for a special assignment. Even now a craft is nearing completion that you will command. I want you to search for the planet Esper, it's inhabitants are accursed peace-loving fools that would not put up much resistance. But they are gifted in the higher mental arts and so are not to be made contact with directly".

"Imperial Master, I am honoured to be chosen".

"Your efficacy in dispatching key foes in recent battles has been noted Keyro, but this will be no large-scale battle. Esper is many Millitons away, and outside of the Alliances' direct reach. Your ship will have to be small enough to run the gauntlet of detection, and fast enough to swiftly return here with your prize".

"What is your desire, Oh great Master?"

"You must kidnap a citizen of Esper, I want information and I am certain that they have it! Do not allow yourself to be drawn into battle, subterfuge is your aim. You will be given our best co-ordinates for Esper, I trust your surreptitious nature will ensure your success. You will choose a crew, I will grant you that, but do not return empty-handed. I will not tolerate failure!"

"By your divine guidance".

Scene 40:

Keyro could not believe his luck; he immediately contacted his closest ally, Lieutenant Orion, and briefed him of the Imperial Master's wishes.

"Orion, I have a special mission for you", he simmered.

"Yes Captain Keyro?" came the snivelling reply.

"We have a duty to impress the Imperial Master, he has entrusted me with a task of the utmost importance".

"Continue, my Captain", sneaked Orion, keen to further his own sorry position in the gruesome rank and file of the Alliance' forces.

Keyro let Orion know the details and they sniggered at the thought of plundering such a defenceless planet.

Scene 41:

"Captain Keyro to launch section 124", the implant relayed to the captain.

As he arrived, he saw a sleek bug-eyed ship, large green blobs of colour on it's hull merged with lurid purple. It was a slick if slimy looking craft, larger than an Imperial fighter, with a similar weapons system, but with a much larger propulsion system. If Keyro had teeth he would have grinned, Orion was little better, his gap-tooth maw smirked as he saw the ship for the first time.

"Termoids, alight!" he snapped at the five footsoldiers awaiting orders at the entrance to the craft.

"I am going to enjoy this my Captain", he oozed.

They boarded the sinister craft, and taking off, they emerged from the still incomplete launching bay of the latest Alliance battle cruiser. On a test flight, the huge yet sad husk of the ancient Kathaar, twisted into a grotesque finned grinning monster, with huge spikes irradiating from it's front. It's maw spewed forth the speeding craft.

"Cluster 1012, upper quadrant, 177 degrees, hyperspeed!" snapped Keyro.

"By your divine guidance" smirked Orion.

Scene 42:

It was at least hyperspeed, as the Master had not lied about the ships rapidity. Millitons passed in an instant, as they sped to their nearest waypoint. The Master had briefed them about brevity of communication, and he dared not contact them directly for fear of alerting the Esperians. It was Keyro's tyrannical nature that eventually got them close to Esper. They had detected a ship of sufficient small size to not be a threat, and powered down hoping to draw their curiosity and pounce when close enough. The unarmed craft closed in, unaware of it's impending fate, a tractor beam suddenly locked onto it's hull, and their communications equipment was swiftly cut away from the ships frame. The Termoids burst in through the still glowing laser torched hole.

"Surrender, your resistance will be crushed" they chirped almost cheekily.

"We need only one", snapped Orion. Brief laser blast saw his gory order carried out.

Scene 43:

The fledgling Laser Memory Dissimilator did it's stuff, the red beam played down on the unfortunate captive, and it was not long before Keyro had his location data. Unable to know when to quit, the over zealous Orion turned up the ray even further, such was his sadistic nature, when he was sure of his position of power. The relatively unproven mind probe was not sufficiently advanced to accept such heavy handling, and a blast from it's crystal core took out the captive and an unfortunate Termoid.

"Orion! Stop playing around" shouted Keyro, anxious to continue.

Orion abandoned the ill-fated craft, leaving behind the two murdered crew, and the stricken Termoid.

Scene 44:

The Alliance ship again gathered speed. Sub-quantum this time, so as not to arouse attention.

They approached Esper with caution and Keyro pondered his options. A large section of the planet seemed uninhabited, this would be the ideal place to make initial touchdown.

Scene 45:

It was only a few Esperians, still up late, who noticed what looked like an unusual meteorite break the skyline and head for the wilderness.

"Must check that out tomorrow" one thought to the other, who nodded, as they turned in. The Blue/Red haze of nightfall giving some much needed cover for the marauding aliens.

Scene 47:

A small hovercraft unloaded from the Alliance speedster, unfolding and assembling in ingenious ways as it did so. Keyro, Orion and two Termoids boarded and sped off over the swamp-like outer lands approaching Esperalia.

Scene 48:

Fate took a cruel turn to the dark side, as the Seer had indeed predicted, as the marauders approached the lone settlement of Imila and Midia. It was almost child's play for the experienced soldiers to approach the darkened dwelling undetected. It was this lack of protection that would have repercussions far outweighing it's initial act.

Leaving the Termoids to monitor the perimeter, Keyro and Orion approached the building, their laser weapons set to stun mode, for silent subdue tactics.

Scene 49:

Midia was lost in a terrible nightmare, the disfigured redhead was bearing down upon her, six pointed helmet atop an evil face, no, wait, two evil faces!

Scene 50:

Imila, was a light sleeper normally, but the work she had been doing, trying to catch up the time lost due to her foot injury had worn her out.

Scene 51:

The faint red glow from the implants of the aliens seemed to merge with the haze of the average Esperian night. Orion stood guard at the unlocked front door, this was all too easy, as Keyro snuck in. He could taste victory and he silently glided on his four lower tentacles. It is perhaps easy to surmise here that fate was on the side of the Alliance, as the first sleeping chamber he approached was that of Midia's. He paused momentarily as he watched the beautiful slender creature in front of him writhe about in a fitful slumber, before administering the deadly beam to Midia's head. He was perhaps a bit surprised to see an immediate calming effect, as the dream was stopped, and the poor youngster was placed silently in limbo. He nearly made a mistake as he was about to call Orion in, but at the last minute remembered what the Imperial Master had said about these people and their mind-reading abilities. Gathering up her limp fragile body in his two upper organic tentacles, he slithered out to the awaiting Orion, and away to the distant hovercraft.

Scene 52:

Imila tossed in her sleep as she subconsciously sensed the craft power up and speed away, but was sadly unaware of her daughter's fate.

Scene 53:

Not waiting to re-pack the hovercraft, the interlopers boarded their escape craft and climbed away from the slumbering Esperians, shielded deep in the wilderness area.

Scene 54:

As morning dawned, Imila awoke and immediately sensed something was wrong. She arose from silken sheets and slipped on a long gown, before venturing into Midia's room.

"Midia" she called fruitlessly. There was no reply.

She went to the doorway, had the girl slipped away? It was always a possibility but she didn't think so. She let her mind trawl the locality, to no avail. Then she noticed some unusual tracks leading away from the domicile. She followed and noticed they were joined by more tracks, but these were not Midia's. In fact they were unlike any she had ever seen. Panic overcame her, and she beamed out an alert that she had hoped to never have had cause to use.

But it was too late. Even now Midia, still tranquilised, was travelling at Hyperspeed towards a fate of almost incomprehensible horror.

The game had really begun to hot up.

EP7:

Scene 55:

Some years have passed on earth since the young Cadet Subaru Hagen had graduated with flying colours. His groundbreaking studies into advanced weaponry earned him the respect of his peers, the attention of his superiors, and brought him into direct contact with Lt. Gen. Kyle.

Subaro was deep in his work when the door buzzer sounded. Moments later it opened, which surprised Hagen a little, as quite a bit of clearance was required to just walk into the advanced weapons research laboratory. He glanced up to see Lt. Gen. Kyle's benevolent face approaching him, a full beard and head of grey hair, now slowly showing signs of white. Strangely this only seemed to amplify his presence. Hagen snapped to attention,

"Lt. Gen. Kyle Sir!" he clicked.

"Now, now, easy Subaru", smoothed Kyle, "I'm not on business. I would like you to attend a special ceremony next week, can't say any more, but I would consider it a great honour if you would be there".

"Of course General" said an intrigued Subaru, "I'll be there, thank you sir".

Scene 56:

If there's one thing that military-esque ceremonies excel in, it's pomp and splendour. Brightly pressed uniforms abounded, trumpets played and figures of various officialdom seemed to inundate the place. Subaru had not seen such lengths gone to before. He had a prime seat at the front of the auditorium, he remembered from last time when he had graduated, but it hadn't been this ceremonious had it?

"All rise for General Miles", came over the tannoy.

The assembled crowds rose and the ancient General was all but wheeled out to the lectern.

"Ladies and gentlemen...", he almost guffawed, and his speech began.

Scene 57:

Subaro wondered why Lt. Gen. Kyle had been so insistent of his attendance, surely it could not have been for this? He had so much work still to do, and like the obsessive he was, he could not wait to get back to his lab. Suddenly his ears pricked up:

"...and so I feel it the right time to announce my retirement", said General Miles, to a mixture of gasps and relieved sighs.

"It gives me the greatest pleasure to announce my successor, with immediate effect, please welcome *General Kyle!*"

Suddenly Subaru was interested, if Kyle was in charge, his progressive views would surely allow much advancement in the scope of the various EDF projects, especially the Star Fleet ones, Subaru hoped. Spontaneous applause broke out before General Kyle could speak. He smiled and let the crowd have it's due. Eventually, he raised his hands and immediately silence descended. Such was the man's charisma.

"Thank you, esteemed colleagues and members of EDF and of course Star Fleet. It gives me great pleasure to accept the position of General from my revered and close friend Admiral Miles". The audience clapped again, it was with some relief to hear that Miles was to become an Admiral. In EDF terms it was akin to being put out to pasture!

"I hope to continue his good work and advance the scope of the Star Fleet projects and cast Earth's influence far beyond our humble planet. But first, I take great pleasure in announcing the following promotions".

Scene 58:

Subaro's mind began to wane again, his attention span was quite short where the subject was one which did not interest him. So, he almost missed his name being called. A colleague next to him nudged him. "Wha...?"

"*Professor Subaru Hagen*".

"Who, me?" he blurted.

The General fixed him with a kindly stare, yes it was him! He scrambled to his feet, to be presented on the stage with his professorship. Kyle warmly shook his hand, "We must talk, drinks in the admiral's bar afterwards", he whispered deftly.

"Yessir", burred Hagen. The Admirals bar! You had to be someone to get in there!

Scene 59:

Subaro nervously waited outside the doors to the Admirals bar. The doorway was flanked by smartly dressed soldiers and he dare not try to walk past them. General Kyle knew where he would be waiting and came out to greet him.

Scene 60:

"Subaro, so glad you could come", and suddenly he was surrounded by opulence, and senior ranking officials. Tall smartly uniformed waitresses deftly delivered drinks on trays to the chattering groups seated at the tables. Kyle took Subaro to a private corner, discrete security men made sure they were out of earshot in an otherwise crowded place.

Scene 61:

"Subaro, I have a special assignment for you", said Kyle.

"I know this is a bit of a surprise, I did pull a few strings to speed along your professorship, but it was always in the offing you know my boy!" he patted Hagen, and took a sip of his drink. Subaro followed suit and tasted the finest spirit he had ever known. He gulped and the General noticed and said:

"It's good stuff isn't it, glad it wasn't all destroyed in that wretched war!"

Subaro nodded.

"Now, I am starting up a new project, it's on Mars. Advanced research, just your cup of tea. What do you say?"

"Why me sir?" The General smiled, "Thought you might ask. I've been watching you Subaro, I need men of your calibre to really take the Star Fleet projects and push them to the next stage".

"Thank you sir", Subaro paused, and Kyle could see he was poised to say something.

"Out with it man!"

"Well, er, I have a friend, I'd hate to lose touch... she has quite a brilliant mind".

"She eh?" Grinned Kyle, "Give me her name and I'll pull some strings, not a word though".

"Yessir!" Hagen beamed, trying to look all official.

"Good show! I'll look forward to dropping in on you. Anyway got to dash, must hobnob with the Admiral" and he winked at Subaro, and, well, that was that!

Scene 62:

It didn't seem like any time had passed at all, as he was standing on the sealed balcony, looking out onto the Red planet. Annalee approached.

"Gosh Subaro, it's amazing to think that we were chosen for such a special mission!" she said.

"Yes", said Hagen trying to hide the awkwardness from his voice. Clearly his friend had no idea of the strings he had had pulled to get her there.

"It is a great privilege and honour", he concluded, as they looked out onto the alien yet mystifyingly beautiful world at their feet.

Little did he know how much more mysterious it was going to become!

Scene 63:

Millitons away, a much less peaceful set of events was playing out. Midia was rudely awakened into a nightmare that was, if anything, more terrible than the one she last recalled having. She was strapped to a table, in some kind of insane operating theatre, where she surmised that patients seemed more likely to end up worse off than before they had received any treatment. She felt quit weak, yet different somehow. A hideous silver headed figure approached her, his right eye seemed to have been replaced with some kind of short telescopic device. He spoke

in a low, self confident voice, and Midia was immediately confused as she could hear words in Esperianese, yet his lips were clearly mouthing another tongue.

“Welcome my dear, now please remember I am here to help you. We need some information, and I have been tasked with obtaining it from you. Now you can make this easy on us both, or as unpleasant for you yet enjoyable for me as you wish”, he crooned.

“Where am I?” she wailed, her voice felt weak, and different. Her abrupt short outburst amused her captor somewhat.

“You have been given some, erm, assistance, in order to exist in our atmosphere”, he explained with almost enjoyment. As he spoke, nanites roved through Midia’s body, enhancing the atmospheric intake capabilities of her lungs. She immediately tried to call for help using her mind. He captor was expecting this and bought his hand across her pale fragile face with a sharp whack!

“Enough! You cannot contact your planet, do you think I would be so stupid as to let you do that?” Clearly the silver-headed tyrant was unaware of the limitations of Midia’s abilities, it was most likely that she did not have the skills, at least yet, to be able to perform such a long range mind link. But he was taking no chances and various energy fields and heavy metals encapsulated the chamber, in a bid to prevent any such thought waves from escaping back to Esper.

“I doubt that you have even been missed” he sneered. “Now, tell me what you know of your Seer’s predictions! We know you harbour this information, don’t make me force it from you”, a big smile spread across his mouth as he said the word “force”. Midia was beginning to go into a panic, she tried to call out, but there was no-one to hear her.

“Don’t try my patience!” snapped the evil oppressor. “Tell me what you know!”

“Never!” she blurted out.

“Aha, resistance, I do love resistance”, he chuckled.

Scene 64:

He swung a red shield over the top of Midia’s head, and pointed the sinister-looking laser memory dissimilator at her cranium.

“This will help you to talk”, he smiled and clicked a white claw-like key. A hum emanated from the device, and a large green sphere glowed in the corner of the room. A beam suddenly played onto the middle of the visor over Midia’s forehead. It burned like no pain she had ever felt. It was like her head was peeling open and her thoughts were escaping, she couldn’t stop them.

“Ahhh, now we are talking”, her silver captor sneered.

Ever the tormentor, his finger moved towards a second talon-like key on the machine. Suddenly a voice was heard:

“Caliban! Do not damage the subject! I may need her again!”

Caliban’s finger froze.

“By your divine guidance”.

Scene 65:

In his newly built chamber in the recently commissioned fortress base, the Imperial Master watched the interrogation of the Esperian captive with greedy eyes. The information flowed forth so easily, almost too easily, onto his display screen. He pondered on the words of the Seer. Some of it he could have predicted himself, he knew that eventually he would have to face down a force of good, but was not so clear why such a force would need to be harboured on a far distant, and obviously primitive planet. He cursed that there was no apparent information on the whereabouts of this distant race, but he did have a clue. It had obviously been visited by the Athenians at some point. So planet Athena would be his next port of call. He paused as the rest of the Seer’s predictions played onto his screen. Hmm, this was more interesting... “A great darkness, the messenger of the destruction of the galaxy. A saviour of evil “Makara”, an angel of death!

Great news indeed the Master thought. The flow of information stopped, a blurred image of a wild banshee, sword wielding and redheaded fuzzed onto the screen. The Master did not give this any heed, at his own cost, and instructed Caliban to preserve the wretch for now.

Scene 66:

“I may have need of her again”.

“By your divine guidance” came the slightly disappointed reply.

Caliban had been looking forward to some mutilation, but now he daren’t disobey his Master. He shut off the interrogation ray and admitted a sedative to the girl. Her pale body lay still again.

The Imperial Master suddenly locked down his many pathways to his minions. This needed much thought.

EP8:

Scene 67:

There was uproar on Esper, nothing like this had happened before. Why hadn't the Seer predicted this?

The King faced an angry crowd at his weekly "meet the people" session. Their anger was almost unheard of, but Imila had been busy stirring things up. She felt betrayed and yet so angry with herself, how could she just "lose" her only daughter?! Even now her friends were angrily petitioning for more information, and action to redress this terrible crime.

The King pleaded for calm, he tried to remind his subjects that the Seer's predictions were not to be taken literally, and there was always some need for interpretation.

"Citizens of Esperia, I implore you to stay calm. We, the elders are already undertaking a full investigation. I cannot as yet give any further information, as I am not prone to speculation".

A young man edged forward "Is this not part of the Seer's prophesy my liege?"

"The prophesies cannot be literally attached to actual events so firmly". Replied the King. Inside he wished he had a better explanation, but as yet, he had no explanation at all. Unable to answer any of the other questions with any real aplomb, the meeting ran its course. Only this time, the King's subjects did not leave the session with good feelings in their hearts. The King had not remembered a more charged meeting, and he reflected upon his less than convincing performance in providing some concise and meaningful answers. But the truth be known, he did not have any real answers to give, his mind full of questions and fears of its own.

Scene 68:

Later, at a meeting of Esperian elders, deep within the Palace: An ancient circular, vaulted stone room, with an equally timeworn table at its centre, became the hub of discussions. As is customary, no assembly member used any kind of mind link at all, for fear of any message leaking out to the general populace.

The King headed the discussion, "Esteemed elders, it would seem that the kidnapped girl, Midia, was the person seen exiting the royal park on the date of the Seer's second prediction. She may have linked to his words and so acquired first-hand information. We are not sure whether this is directly related to her disappearance, but it is a factor we must take into account".

The Chief Advisor to the King was first to reply. A wizened man with sparse wisps of white hair sprouting from his head, his long pointed white beard touched the table's grained surface.

"We have located evidence of the alien technology involved in her kidnap, my lord. Are we any closer to identifying the tyrants responsible for this despicable act?"

"The abandoned craft is indeed alien in origin, Chief Advisor. A sweep of Esper also reveals that Midia is no longer near to us. The technology of the craft displays much advancement, and there is a sense of great evil within its very structure. I must assume arrogance on the part of the progenitors, as they have left behind such a clue, seemingly without concern".

Scene 69:

At this point the Charismatic and outspoken Captain Corliss butted in, fresh back from his long space journey: "This is just what I had been predicting all along! We have been resting on our laurels, demi-parsecs of peace have made us blind to the very threat that the Seer is trying to warn us against!" he defiantly stated. "Now if I had my way..."

He was cut off by the Chief Advisor mid-sentence: "We all know your views Captain Corliss, yet you seem content to disappear on voyages for countless k-parsecs, but demand our unquestioning attention upon your return".

The Captain became angered: "Chief Advisor, I am certain that I have come across the very essence of the messenger of destruction that the Seer himself spoke of. If I am correct, then a darkness the like of which we have never experienced before is about to descend upon us. We MUST equip ourselves for defence, at the very least!"

"Is that all you care for Corliss?" snapped the Chief Advisor, "Machines of war?, Must I remind you we are a race of peaceful beings, dedicated to the furtherment of the finest Mental Arts", he haughtily asserted.

"At least let us prepare for the worst, we need ships if nothing else!" begged Corliss.

The King interjected: "Although I want to agree with our respected Chief Advisor, your judgement has much to commend it Corliss. Therefore I recommend that we at least re-start the galleon project".

Captain Corliss sat back, finally a shred of hope for him to work with., "Thank you my lord", he said, with relief.

"I trust that we will give Captain Corliss our support" the King stated, fixing each advisor in turn with his stare. The group reluctantly nodded and disbanded, huddling into smaller clusters as they left the chamber.

Scene 70:

Captain Corliss wasted no time in making his way to his personal transporter. He had to get his team together quickly, there was much to be done.

Scene 71:

The King himself made his way to his private chambers, where the Queen patiently awaited her sire's return.

"My dear", she said, sensing his tension, "How did it go".

"I had to allow Corliss some leeway", he sighed.

The Queen tried to hide her relief, she had long held the dashing Corliss in the highest of esteem.

"I'm sure you did the right thing, we need to prepare ourselves, you heard the Seer as did I", she calmly stated. "Anyway, I have some news that will bring you much delight", Pausing briefly she went on "I'm expecting a child....". The King's gasp of joy stopped her speech, and she felt relieved he was happy about it.

"That is great news!" he beamed, "Just what we need to boost the morale of our subjects. They need something positive to focus upon".

They held each other in an elegant, loving embrace, each trying to give reassurance, yet needing so much themselves. Little did they know that their child would come to give so much reassurance and love to so many, such a special child that would surpass even it's royal lineage.

Scene 72:

Corliss arrived at a quiet, deserted part of Esper, on the outskirts of the city. He waved his hand at a dusty black box at the edge of the roadside. Immediately, a section of pathway slid back to reveal an underground opening.

Scene 73:

Corliss stepped inside and was immediately transported at speed via a superfast elevator, to arrive at a corridor, deep underground. He walked into the corridor, and along to the first double doors on the left. Looking up at a scanner lens, the doors suddenly slid open and the taste of stale air met his senses. He had not been here for a while.

Scene 74:

He walked into the room, which revealed itself to be a huge hangar. Lights automatically began to illuminate, and systems began to come on-line. Then, as he began to familiarise himself with his surroundings, a bleeping sound told him the surface hatch had again been accessed. He was not worried, after all, he was expecting company.

Scene 75:

He went back out into the corridor to greet the arrivals, and as the elevator doors slid open, a boy ran out and rushed up to him "Daddy!" He cried with joy.

Corliss bent down and scooped up his most precious possession, "Halley my dear son, how happy I am to see you again".

Behind Halley, a tall slender young man approached the happy father and son: "Corliss, it is great to see you again, good news about our projects I hope?"

"Well, as best as we are going to get for now Dorrin, dear friend" Corliss smiled. "Come, let us make a start, there is so much to be done.

Scene 76:

They walked back into the huge hangar and were at once dwarfed by the beautiful silver hull of the prototype space galleon, the Skull!

Scene 77:

Further afield, in the distant untamed wilderness of Esper, a plant rustled, was something there, hiding away?

The fleeting glimpse of yellow eyes for a moment as the ancient and reclusive creature stopped it's foraging briefly and looked up into the sky. It seemed to be sensing something, something new and powerful. It stood tall and beat it's chest and gave out a growl, the only sound to break the silence, before seemingly melting back into it's habitat once again. Had it sensed what was in store, the great changes that were afoot? Only time would tell.

EP9:

Scene 78:

Newly promoted Commander Keyro stood at the command lectern of the latest Imperial Alliance flagship battle cruiser of the Kathaar class. The first of it's kind and as yet untested in combat. Keyro was itching to try it out. His orders were still fresh in his mind, they were to attack and subdue the ancient race of Athenians on their home planet Athena. Ahead of the giant craft, twin huge doors opened and the sparkle of space immediately became visible beyond. He turned his one yellow organic eye to his captain and issued his orders:

"Orion, ahead one quarter impulse, take us out of here!" he snapped.

"By your divine guidance" simpered the also newly promoted Captain Orion. "Ahead one quarter, standard departure 1 Theta!" he barked at the Termoid crew.

"Ahead one quarter impulse, std dep. 1 Theta" they bleated.

The craft, massive in it's own right, yet totally dwarfed by the gigantic Thalian fortress planet, slid through the doors and into space on it's first mission.

"Sector 12, lower quadrant, take us to Athena, Hyperspeed!"

"By your divine guidance".

The huge ship, belying it's bulk, sped off impressively into the distance, watched ever closely by the Imperial Master from his high command chamber.

Scene 79:

It was not long before the planet Athena was showing on the advanced mode attack screens. Keyro headed towards the most densely populated area his scanners showed up.

"Open a hailing channel" ordered Keyro.

"Hailing channel!" retorted Orion.

His words slavishly re-uttered by the Termoid bridge crew, red eyes flashing acquiescence.

"I demand to speak to this planet's leader!" said Keyro, optimistically.

Nothing...

Again Keyro uttered "Answer me, Atheniens, or face the wrath of the Imperial Alliance's most powerful battle cruiser!"

No response.

"Have it your way, this is your final warning!"

"Let them know we mean business" he commanded to Orion.

"By your divine guidance. Fire Laser Torpedoes!"

"Laser Torpedoes, firing", the Termoids relayed.

Scene 80:

Bright blasts of power shot forth from the Alliance symbol on the nose of the ship, and played destruction down on the ancient city below.

"Launch carriers, take the fight closer! Orion"

"With pleasure Commander", said Orion gleefully, as his elevator lowered him from the bridge and quickly sped him towards his command carrier.

Scene 81:

Six carrier ships emerged from the gaping maw of the cruiser, each carrying the Alliances finest fighter craft. They dived down, Orion's ship being the last of the six, their arms moving into position to release the small attack ships. The fighters streamed away, and blazed destruction on the buildings below. Giant ancient Grecian-like columns blasted apart as the peace-loving Athenians ran for cover. Their tactic of silence having little effect on their attackers.

Scene 82:

As the terror and destruction reigned down, a beam of white light approached from deepest space, and tore straight through an Alliance carrier, piercing it like a spear. It's power systems disrupted, the ship lost control and plunged into the ground, sending stone and earth flying.

"What was that!" exclaimed an astonished Keyro.

"I do not know, maybe we are under attack?" ventured Orion, fear spreading into his voice.

The beam had vanished.

"Termoids, ascertain the source of this weapon!" said Keyro hastily.

"Beam of unknown origin, not from Planet Athena", came the mechanical replies.

"Scan for more incoming blasts!" Keyro quipped! "Ready evasive manoeuvres".

Scene 83:

As destruction rained down on Athena, a faint signal flickered onto Keyro's screen.

Soldiers of the Imperial Alliance, we mean you no harm, please cease your attack". An old Athenian elder pleaded.

"So now you talk!", sneered Keyro. "You have information we want, give it to us!"

"Please please, stop the firing!, We will assist as best we can".

"Orion, break off your attack, But re-group over the main city. We will brook no insolence!"

"I am Commander Keyro of the Imperial Alliance. I request immediate counsel with the highest in your land".

"I am the Historacles, of the Palinean highest order, rulers of Athena", came the reply.

"We have information that you have visited a distant race, primitive yet special in it's importance to us" Keyro eagerly demanded.

"Please, we have visited many planets, but that was countless demi-parsecs ago, our energy sources here on Athena have long since dwindled and ancient knowledge lost on such exploration".

Whilst Keyro did not really want to hear this, his cruiser's scanners had picked up evidence of long abandoned ancient technologies, together with recent evidence of a more primitive existence, in amongst dilapidated cities.

Sensing that the Imperial Master would not be too impressed if he returned home with nothing, he decided that it might be prudent to take large numbers of prisoners, for a substantial brain scanning back at the Imperial Fortress.

"You give me no option but to destroy your primitive culture and demonstrate that the Imperial Alliance cannot be bargained with!"

With that, he severed the comms link to Athena and ordered the attack to re-commence, on a wider field. Little did he know that he was destroying the very ancient technology that would have lead the Alliance straight to their goal, the planet Earth!

Scene 84:

On the Athenian surface, the beam of light played down on a strangely familiar, very worn cylindrical stone altar. It was situated amongst an abandoned temple of Grecian style. In an instant the beam had gone, leaving a ball of white light around the stone altar, which receded to reveal a figure alien to Athena, half-crazed out of her wits. Unable to comprehend what had happened to her, Mary staggered away from the stone, and glancing round, initially thought she was still in Greece, on holiday with her friend Pippa. Laser torpedoes struck the temple surroundings and blasted the place apart forever. The Imperial fighters ordered to concentrate fire upon the destination of the white beam which had destroyed one of their carriers.

Scene 85:

Orion noticed the lone figure seem to appear at the temple, moments before the lasers hit the surface. He contacted Keyro:

"Commander, a figure seems to be at the heart of that destructive beam".

Keyro's initial thought was one of destruction, but then he made a decision that would prove to be his one saving grace.

"Capture them!" he ordered, "Maybe we'll get some better answers from them".

Orion ordered the fighters to break off and one to land and recover the figure, that was if he hadn't already blown it to bits! The alien craft hovered over the ruins and touched down in a suitable clearing. The Termoid disembarked and began to search for any trace of the figure.

Scene 86:

Mary had been thrown clear of the main debris by the explosive blasts. She lay, unconscious, with a deep head wound, her right arm all but torn away from her torso at the shoulder. In her other hand, she still gripped the remains of her bag, as if that would have helped her! She had not got long left to live, yet somehow, a spark within her clung to life. Her limp scorched body was gathered up by the Termite and spirited away to the awaiting battle cruiser. No Athenian had seen any of this, it may have been better for them if they had, as this may have prevented such cruel torture of the harvested survivors, both on the Cruiser and back at the Thalian fortress. Eventually the destruction ended, Keyro actually rather unsure when to stop.

"Orion, call off your force, return to the cruiser" he ordered.

"By your divine guidance" mewed Orion, the mission nothing but success in his cowardly eyes.

Scene 87:

The Imperial Master was less impressed when they returned to base.

He summoned Keyro to his debriefing chamber. "What is the meaning of this?" He gestured to Keyro to view a giant screen showing the destruction raining down upon the Athenian Planet.

"Where is my information?!" he roared.

Keyro quivered, "They were not forthcoming, Imperial Master".

"Yet you destroyed the very equipment that we may have used to locate the planet we seek?" he enquired incredulously. "Once again, almost mindless violence with little tactical thought attached to it's application!"

"Great Master, I have bought back many prisoners, as yet they may have the information we need", Keyro ventured.

"For your sake they had better Keyro, you arrogant fool!" blasted the Imperial Master at his imbecilic and terrified Commander.

"Dismissed, for now.."

"By your divine guidance", Keyro bowing as he retreated backwards out of the debriefing chamber.

The Imperial Master gave out a growl, and pondered again that he needed a better implant, to keep his commanders in check, yet allow them enough free reign to act decisively. But above this, he needed decent commanders full stop!

Scene 88:

As the motionless, incapacitated prisoners were implanted with bionic technology, and nanites, their brains were scanned for uploading to the Imperial database. They lay on conveyors, slowly being sorted into usable and unusable due to severe injury. More than a few were already dead. Their corpses ejected from the lines and fed to the furnaces that powered the very plant that was processing them. Those few deemed as having potential, were diverted away to be given higher ranks than lowly Termoids, as was required by the Imperial Alliance Master Plan of total galaxy domination.

Scene 89:

The unconscious Mary was amongst the Athenians, on the conveyors. A swift automated injection of nanites entered her body and began the life-prolonging changes needed to keep her alive, at least until the laser memory dissimilator could extract it's information. The red brain scan beam played down upon her battered forehead, some data was relayed, then the conveyor stopped abruptly. An alarm sounded and a beacon flashed above the

dissimilator, alerting a technician's attention away from his overall monitoring duties. The scanner was designed to flag up anything out of the ordinary, and Mary was certainly that. Technician 3445 checked the readouts, glanced at the body in front of him, and then at the screen again. He realised that a decision was needed that was above his rank, and swiftly tapped his instructions into the conveyor control pad. Mary's body was diverted away from the main lines to a separate chamber, for closer inspection.

Scene 90:

Desperate to further his own sorry affairs, Councillor Darlan of the Imperial Executive Council had instructed the technicians under his direct jurisdiction to be extra aware of any possible important information that they detected during their routine work. He was keen to impress The Imperial Master with his diligence, and regularly patrolled his area with malice. Spotting one such minion up ahead he ordered:

"Technician 4412! Status report!" The technician, one up from a Termoid, read back a carefully practiced message.

"All scanners are at optimum Councillor Darlan, nothing further to report".

"Damn your automation!" the councillor retorted. He felt sure that the technicians hid behind its bland obedience.

"Well,.. continue!" he quipped angrily, his narrow red eyes glowing from a long thin ridged head. An artificial limb at one side of his body, his own pincer claw at the other. With the ever present implant monitoring him, as it protruded from the top left of his head, a mass of wires and metal, making an ugly silhouette even uglier. He turned and swished away, his cape flowing behind him, its colour and insignia denoting his rank.

Scene 91:

No sooner had he started down the corridor, than another technician called to him: "Councillor Darlan!" He turned and looked at the Thalian, checking its designation he snapped: "Technician 3445, report".

"Unusual brain scan activity, Athenian captive 12xh35, moved to inspection chamber 13 sigma".

"Escort me there immediately!" demanded the Councillor. Was this his chance to out manoeuvre his peers?

Scene 92:

He looked down at Captive 12xh35, Athenian conquest, and was immediately intrigued. This did not look like an Athenian. His Implant sensed something and relayed caution to Darlan. He looked at the limp charred frail body with puzzlement, then something caught his eye which made him freeze. The frayed remains of a fabric receptacle of some kind was still tightly gripped by the captive's remaining undamaged hand. Attached to this piece of material was a metal ring, through which was threaded a clear hard thin square substance. Inside the clear pane, was a slightly faded picture, one which caught Darlan's eye and caused pangs of disbelief to surge into his Implant. He grasped the item for a closer look, and it fell away from the ring as he did so. Unbelievably a figure was depicted in detail, allowing Darlan to see that it looked for all of Thalian like a Commander!?! He stared in disbelief, his thoughts relaying his implant to re-scan the artefact. Sure enough, a figure wearing a Thalian cloak, with markings and colour showing the rank of a Commander. The figure was not familiar to him, but held a Thalian sword in its hands. The left limb being organic, the right one being bionic. A slender face wearing a six-pointed helmet with an implant over its left eye, a small face with glowing red eyes that seemed to look right through Darlan. He staggered back. "How could this be he thought?" turning the tiny picture over, there were six alien symbols on the reverse. He had no idea what they meant, and his implant was unable to translate either. Immediately his thoughts were picked up by the Imperial Master.

Scene 93:

Simultaneously, in another chamber, the seemingly sedated body of Midia sat bolt upright, eyes still closed, and screamed "MAKARA!", before collapsing back down to motionless silence.

Scene 94:

The Imperial Master's eyes glowed brightly, "The Seer was right!" he exclaimed. Suddenly events were unfolding.

EP10:

Scene 95:

If the Imperial Master had had a heart, it's beat would have quickened. He had sensed the raw fear of the Esperian Prisoner, such that she was able to break away, albeit momentarily, from the bonds that subdued her, and scream the name of her tormentor. He summoned Keyro and Orion immediately to his chamber.

Their implants burning home their master's orders, Keyro, fearing the worst, and Orion, always fearing the worst, hurried to the Imperial Master's chamber. Keyro caught up with Orion in the corridor outside the huge chamber entrance doors, "Leave the talking to me!" he ordered desperately. Orion nodded as the doors opened, and they shuffled in, heads bowed.

Scene 96:

"You pitiful fools!" the Master boomed, "You may have accidentally redeemed yourselves".

"Wha? We acted only to serve" simpered Keyro.

"Enough! Tell me exactly what happened when that beam of light struck and destroyed one of your carriers".

"Master, we were unprepared for an assault from outside of the planet's confines", flustered Keyro.

"Orion, your report?" the Imperial Master turned to the cowering Captain.

"My Commander is correct, the beam originated in deep space, our sensors were unable to detect it's origin".

"Yes but what of the captive?"

"Captive? The injured weakling female? Blurted Orion, "She was of little interest to us..."

"She is of utmost importance you fool! The data from your scanners suggests she was by the spot the beam touched the planet. Maybe she was carried there by the beam?"

"It is possible, great Master, but what technology could do such a feat?"

"The very technology you two cretins destroyed!" the Master roared. "Luckily for you, she has survived, otherwise you pair would have not. Dismissed!"

The cowards scuttled away, "Who is this the Imperial master speaks of?" Whispered Orion to an equally puzzled Keyro. "Why is she so important?"

"Orion, if I had known that, I would have mentioned it to the Imperial Master don't you think?!" replied Keyro exasperatedly. "At least we have survived his wrath".

"For now", whimpered Orion.

Scene 97:

The Imperial Master inspected the tiny picture, recovered from the captive by Councillor Darlan. He didn't quite understand it's origins, but he knew it was part of the Seer's predictions. To him, it was the dark forces of the Galaxy, amassing their might behind his evil cause. The picture was clearly of an unknown Thalian Commander, but it was so intriguing as it showed a *female* commander, and this was novel to The Imperial Master. While the Thalian race increased it's ranks' numbers through capture and bionic control via implants, he was aware of the more organic method of reproduction that he had assimilated data about, from some of the planets and races he had conquered. Hitherto now, the vast majority of captured troops put forward for implantation had been the males of the species. The Master had preferred the generally larger strength and size of the males, of most species. He had also encountered some difficulty in getting female captives to successfully integrate with the bionic nature of the Thalian ways. Males had seemed so much more manipulable when removing the emotional traits he so hated. Love and caring, goodness and charity, seemed so much harder to eradicate in most female captives. He always suspected there were other favourable traits he was missing with such a blanket selection policy, but had engaged little resource or time to find out.

Now he was presented with an enigma, and the Seer's prediction forced him to concede that fate was sometimes not as predictable as he would have wanted.

There was also the question of the implant, no such advanced implant had yet been conceived: An actual face of its own, maybe a voice and life-presence of its own as well? But what subject could carry such an implant, nay, a sentient symbiont, in co-existence, with success?

The next question was the most puzzling of all. It was obvious to the Master that fate had contrived to deliver this subject to him, but the picture that it seemingly carried about with it, as some kind of token? How could that be? Is it possible that this being is from another time? A time when the total domination of the Galaxy by The Alliance had been completed, and individual races worshipped their Thalian superiors like Gods?

He had the captive brought to the main interrogation chamber.

Scene 98:

Caliban gleefully wheeled in his next victim, pushing the trolley with the inert Midia on it to one side as he positioned the new captive under the dissimulator's probe.

Midia at once went into a hysterical fit, the severity of which was causing actual risk to her continued survival. Caliban sensed that the Imperial Master's presence was strong, his every move was monitored through his implant.

"Caliban, remove her from the chamber, quickly!" ordered the Imperial Master.

"By your divine guidance".

Caliban restrained the fitful Midia and whisked her, still strapped to her trolley/bed, down the corridor to another sealed chamber. He noted that her fits grew less, but were still evident.

"Leave her!" The Master growled, "she will live!"

Caliban rushed back to the main theatre.

"Stabilise her condition, then proceed with the laser memory dissimulator" The Master sounded.

"By your divine guidance".

Caliban turned to an attendant Termoid who handed him a gas syringe. It gave a Hsss! As it injected Mary with more nanites.

"Master, it is unlikely we can save her arm", said Caliban.

"So be it".

The nanites set to work, staunching the wounds and replenishing lost fluids as Caliban set up a drip into Mary's good arm. They worked away to remove waste and improve lung function, as they did so, Mary's breathing came to an almost stop, as it was amongst Thilians. The huge gash in the right-hand side of her head was not looking good. Caliban noted: "Master, this type of injury would most likely be fatal in such a weak species, something is keeping her alive, other than us".

The Imperial Master sensed a great force of evil and concluded "This is a gift to us Caliban, the dark forces are so strong, yet I detect the fetid stench of good here as well. The dissimulator, now!"

Caliban quickly powered up the probe's crystal, and selecting the lowest setting played the beam onto the red shield over poor Mary's scarred forehead... Initially nothing happened and then..."BLAM!", Caliban was thrown against the walls of the theatre. The memory dissimulator, lay silent and totally defunct.

"There is much power here", concluded the Imperial Master. "Our subject lies still, deep in a dream state. I must try other tactics. Begin the implant conversion, I will create a special Symbiote for our new Commander".

"Symbiote? New commander?"

"Do NOT question my orders!"

"By your divine guidance".

Scene 99:

Caliban was permitted to look upon the picture, for guidance of the more direct, less divine sort. His implant assimilated the details, and he noted the Master's insistence upon closely copying this "Prophecy" as he called it.

Caliban sensed that the Imperial Master's immediate presence had waned, but he was not so rash as to think that he was really alone in his work. He speculated why he has been tasked with this operation, normally bionic implant

work was the domain of semi-automated plants, under close supervision from attendant technicians. Still, His Master had ordered it, and whether he liked it or not, he had to carry out those orders.

He performed a detailed scan of the captive's body, whose condition had now stabilised thanks to the action of the nanites. He noted the nanites usage of body fat to generate raw materials to effect repairs and enhancements, as was the way of the Thalian bionic process. As far as possible, disease, weakness, and the reliance on an atmosphere and continual organic replenishment had been all but removed. The Thalian race, in all its evil glory, was a utopian one of sorts.

His scan immediately revealed some surprises. The body had a genetic make-up that belied its appearance. He investigated further and noticed signs of a surgery of some sort to radically alter certain parts of the captive's anatomy. "So we are not the only ones who artificially alter their race", he pondered. Suddenly he stopped the nanites progress and called the Imperial Master.

"Imperial Master, I crave your guidance".

"Elaborate" came the impatient reply.

"Master, this body has undergone radical surgical alteration, plus the actions of semi-organic chemicals to change its basic genetic appearance, from that of Male to Female!" The surprise in Caliban's voice made it clear that he had not come across this before, and also could see no benefit in such a process.

"Caliban, there are forces at work here higher than your own meagre mind could appreciate" quipped the Master. "We may not be dealing with one entity alone here. Instruct your nanites to proceed with the enhancements, yet preserve the physical appearance of the female form, that is what the prophesy decrees".

"By your divine guidance".

With a signal from his implant, Caliban sent the nanites on their way again.

Scene 100:

Slowly the scars on Mary's skin began to disappear, superficial wounds began to heal. The very processes of aging began to slow down. Indeed, within the Thalian process, whilst being one so evil, reposed almost the very elixir of life that so many had searched countless star systems for numerous terra-parsecs, in vain explorations to uncover. It was not long before the vast manufacturing capabilities of the Imperial Fortress planet had provided Caliban with the items he requested.

A Termoid arrived with a large container, hovering above the corridor floor, full of the "goodies" he so eagerly awaited.

"Your items" came the bland exclamation.

"Over there", Caliban gestured, not hiding his contempt for the lower ranks.

The Termoid pressed a concealed keypad on the box, which silently came to rest on the floor, and left.

Caliban eagerly reached inside and drew out a bionic upper torso section, with attached right-hand bionic arm. His genuine creepy pleasure at the most gruesome of tasks did not engender him to any of his peers, that was for sure. Not that "engendering" was inherent much in Thalian society!

Taking a laser scalpel, he leaned over the body of his captive.

EP11:

Scene 101:

Deep within Mary's seemingly impregnable consciousness, another battle was taking place. She could not seem to awake herself from a dream, she surmised. She was lying down on the floor, still by the disintegrating Grecian temple, although it did not seem quite the same as the one she remembered standing at. Actually she was having trouble remembering much at all, including who she was, rather worryingly. The roller coaster ride through the spacial portal, created by the ancient Athenians to allow them to travel between Earth and Athena had long since lain in semi-dereliction. It's last activation had been to transport a terrified Mary to Athena, and the lack of calibration and poor condition of the portal gates had caused the journey to be unpleasant in the extreme. Losing all feeling of time and space, Mary's already unstable mind had been driven to the very edge of madness.

She now lay, in a dream state, seemingly on Athena, right in the middle of an Alliance attack. She felt a sensation on her head and tried to sit up. Blood ran down her face and her fingers touched a huge open gash in her skull. Bleary and bloodshot, her eyes could hardly focus as she became aware of the remains of her right arm. Deep gashes into her upper right shoulder and breast seeped blood through torn and damaged clothing. Was she going to die?

Scene 102:

A figure approached her, it was vaguely familiar. A shrill woman's voice said: "You will not die my dear. I will not let you escape like that".

"Escape?" She tried to say as the figure came more into view. Her eyes struggling to focus, but familiarity was beginning to paint a picture.

"Is it coming back to you?" The cloaked figure asked.

Mary managed to force herself into a sitting position, she could feel life slipping away all the time. She was about to ask something like "Where am I?" or some such, when the cloaked figure spoke again: "It has been so long, it feels like an eternity has passed until this point".

The figure seemed to be wearing a strange helmet, with six points on it, three on either side. It was all so annoyingly close but her mental functions were moving as though wading through treacle. The figure leaned over Mary and offered her a metallic hand to help her up. It was a strange gesture, and one Mary did not react eagerly towards. "I...I don't think I can stand.." she fumbled.

"Hah, you humanoids are so pathetic, I can't wait for this to be over, soon..."

"Hold on! What's with the insults? Wait for what to be over?" The cold tone of the figure's voice suddenly gave some impetus to Mary's faculties. "Don't I know you? She said, attaching the voice to some far distant memory.

"You should do, you've secretly admired me haven't you?", said that voice, that female voice.

The flashes of light of the now, almost superfluous explosions around them, illuminated her face, and Mary saw with some horror a strange face. It had an eye patch of some sort, two red dots glowed from the patch, no it was another Face! Mary almost sank back from her awkward seating position, she knew this face. She began to stutter, not used to the sudden uncluttered space within her mind, where demons had once permeated.

"B.but, how? You? M.M.M.."

Scene 103:

She did not get to finish her sentence. Her overloaded mind unable to process what was going on. Blacking out again, she came to after a moment and was surprised to find herself now lying in some kind of room, the explosions had gone. "Hold on! Wasn't that..." Her reasoning process was interrupted again. Someone else was now leaning over her, but they were not looking at her, they seemed to be *working* on her! She felt completely paralysed, able to only stare at the silver-headed figure, who appeared to be attending to her wounds "Ahh, at last, some medical attention" she thought. But no, this was not quite the attention she was hoping for, as she felt a sensation of burning which seemed to be coming from the deep incisions the figure was making into her chest. She

surmised that they should have hurt a lot more than that, but hurt they did. Wait! The figure was cutting away the last remnants of her severed right arm. She tried to move, or at least shout out yet could do nothing but watch. A terrible torture indeed, was this what it was like when patients prematurely awoke from anaesthetic during an operation, but were unable to let their surgeon know? This surgeon certainly seemed oblivious to her plight.

She could do nothing but watch, as the deep yet structured cuts through her torso's upper right side continued to be made. Confusingly, there didn't seem to be much blood, as the pain in her head due to that huge gash began to make itself felt. She tried to move her gaze around the room, with limited success; a drip was attached to her left arm which thankfully seemed intact. In fact her left arm seemed quite slender and had very smooth blemish-free skin. She found herself considering the irony of that, here she was with a seemingly perfect left arm, but no right arm at all. There is no justice in the world is there! She then noticed the surgeon had returned to her right side, and she noticed his head. He seemed to be wearing some kind of monocle or something, no more of a microscope, she surmised it must be to enhance his vision while operating on her. She was starting to get a bit used to the pain, well she was no stranger to that. Having gone through gender reassignment surgery had left her feeling she could have tackled anything, surgery-wise, such was the pain she had endured to become who she knew she should always have been.

She wondered when the anaesthetic would wear off, not knowing that she was not under any such substance. Her mind had actually partially shut down to protect itself, leaving just this window onto her current situation, for her to observe and partially feel. The surgeon lifted something up from below the table on which she lay, it was metallic. Amazingly he began to offer it up to her lacerated torso, as she felt her upper body being raised above the operating table. Wires seemed to twitch from within the metal appendage, they played upon her skin, ran into her deep wounds and seemed to just dig in. Now that hurt, that really hurt! The implant, as she decided it was, was then guided by Caliban over the right side of her severely damaged upper torso. Like some sort of metal crop-top, it seemed to move over and into her, across her chest, over the remains of her torn right breast and then over her unmarked left breast. It was not a nice feeling at all, and really began to test her resolve, not that she could have done anything anyway. The implant covered all the scars and deep cuts, and seemed to almost snap closed around her upper body. The metal was a deep bronze-like colour, and she noticed that some attempt had been made to preserve her femininity, as there were lumps in the implant, where her breasts would be. Hold on, would be? Surely they were still under there somewhere? She had gone to great lengths to get them, and another irony flashed through her mind: She had refused to have any artificial implants, or a "Boob job" as it was more crudely known, preferring her own small, yet 100% natural breasts. Now, she seemed to be sporting a rather more invasive artificial implant! At least the overall proportions of these new "lumps" were similar in size to her own originals. "Phew, I haven't been kidnapped by perverts then", she thought with relief.

Her attendant surgeon was adjusting something on her right hand shoulder. OMG! It was an artificial limb to replace the damaged organic one! She stared at her new limb in disbelief. More disbelief came as she found she could feel the metal limb being moved about by the silver-domed surgeon. Her chest burned as the implant settled into her very tissue, becoming one with her organic flesh. She looked at the join between metal and flesh. It was so neat, she hardly believed it was possible. There was no blood either, it actually looked quite tidy in a gruesomely cyborg-way. That's it! She was now a cyborg! It was a painful process, and she could still feel the sensation of alterations going on deep within her. This thing was not going to come off in a hurry she thought, how am I going to explain this away? She began to fret. Explain it away to who exactly? She couldn't remember, so much of her mind seemed inaccessible to her. She felt her eyes burning, they felt sore, yet the vision they offered was surprisingly good, had they always been this good she wondered? The surgeon seemed to have finished with her bionic arm, a pity she couldn't try it out, but it was still conveying strange feelings of weight, and touch to her.

Scene 104:

She found herself beginning to slip away from consciousness, and struggled to remain awake, if indeed she was awake at all. She became aware of the surgeon behind her head, this time she was unable to see anything, other

than his strange monocle bearing down on her face occasionally. He seemed totally unaware that she could see him, his one un-monocled eye had looked into her eyes a few times, but as she couldn't move, or even blink, he had no way of knowing that she was observing him. From the pain and sensation she could feel from the head wound she had sustained on the right hand side of her head, she knew he was working on it. Her very scalp seemed to be burning, as a lock of bright red hair fell over her face, which he brushed away immediately. Bright red? What was that all about? She could not remember much, but she was fairly sure that she had been a brunette.

What Mary could not have known was that the nanites flooding through her body, repairing and regenerating, had caused the colour change in both her hair and eyes, as they were now bright red. The repairing process was also speeding up the rate of hair growth as well.

Scene 105:

Suddenly her head was propped up a bit and she was able to see a lot more of her surroundings, but they were not what she was concentrating on. She could see the rest of her body, and was relieved to note that there were no further Cyborg bits anywhere. But her body did look different though. Very toned, no sign of body fat anywhere, with a smooth lower torso that she didn't remember having, as she'd always been a bit partial to her food. Her skin looked amazing, pale yes, but blemish-free and smooth looking. How had she achieved that? A single strip of metal protruded down from the centre of the upper cyborg implant, and seemed to stop just below her bellybutton, covering it from view. It seemed to sting a bit there as well, so she suspected that the implant had penetrated her at that point also.

Her head was suddenly allowed to rest on the table again, and she could no longer look at anything but the ceiling, which seemed to be made of metal. She was aware of the surgeon moving towards her head again, and then something was being slipped over her head, heavy and bulky, but not covering her face though, maybe some kind of open-faced helmet? That word began to bring back a memory for a brief moment, before abject pain in her head, around her wound, something forcing its way in? Aargh! Her vision blurred and immense pain followed, with a total sense of being violated inside her very mind causing loss of vision, shortly followed by loss of consciousness.

Scene 106:

The Imperial master contacted Caliban again, "Are you ready for the symbiote?" he asked impatiently.

"Indeed Master, the bionic work is done, and quite pleasing if I may say so too".

"Now apply this," the Master said, as a Termoid entered the Theatre carrying a small box.

Caliban watched as the mindless soldier placed the box down on his operating table and left the room.

"Now Caliban, we will test the Seer again!", and the Imperial Master laughed.

Caliban tried to quell a shudder, he had not heard the Master laugh before, and found the experience rather disquieting. He reached into the box and brought out a small black metallic face.

"He will know what to do" said the Master.

"He?" quivered Caliban silently, "He who?" he wondered.

Caliban gently placed the small inert face over the left eye of his "patient" and stood back to watch.

A myriad of wires came out from underneath the tiny face, as it touched Mary's skin. Suddenly they disappeared again, plunging deep into her left hand visual cortex, and headed straight for her central nervous system. Mary's inert body shivered momentarily, before laying still once more. Any chance that she had had of escaping her fate had just vanished.

"Leave them to get acquainted" The Master ordered.

"By your divine guidance", Caliban uttered, as he emotionlessly left the room.

EP12:

Scene 107:

Mary was now standing in a hospital ward. But this time she was not the patient. She slowly became aware of the person lying in the bed in front of her. It was her old friend Pippa, who seemed to be sleeping. There were tubes and wires coming from Pippa's motionless body, the slow blip blip of a heart monitor the only real indication of life. That and the short breaths that she sporadically took.

"Oh my goodness!" exclaimed Mary as she leant over her friends' comatose body. Such was her shock at seeing her friend in such a state that she failed to notice anything unusual about herself. Like the bionic right arm, the six pointed helmet she now sported, or the shrill cold voice that came from her lips. No, Mary was concentrating on her friend. Suddenly Pippa's eyes opened and stared at Mary. They conveyed absolute terror, Pippa's mouth opened and she began to scream, and scream and scream! Mary rocked back on her red knee-length boots. "It's me Pippa, it's Mary..." she stopped and gasped. This time she had noticed something! She looked down at her right hand, it was a dark metallic bionic limb, the three fingers clicked together as metal touched metal. She looked further down at herself, her upper body was encased in metal, she was wearing a short skirt of a heavy brown leather-like material, clad in strips of metal. Her knees wore protective metal pads, and then those long red boots.

Aghast, she stumbled backwards and looking up, caught her reflection in a glass partition in the ward. There in a long purple cloak, with gold retaining chains, and a heavy gold segmented necklace around her slender neck, stood a demon in a six-pointed helmet, a grotesque opening on the upper right hand side of the helmet showing masses of wires and nerve dendrons intermingling together. A single red organic eye looked back at her, and suddenly she saw the small metallic face seemingly covering her left eye, it's own blank piercing red eyes shining back at her. All the time Pippa was screaming, the noise a deathly soundtrack to Mary's own horror.

Scene 108:

Then the glass partition suddenly faded and vanished, but the reflection remained, or was it a reflection? The Demon spoke, in that shrill cold female voice, devoid of warmth and emotion, "At last we meet on my terms" It said. The penny dropped, "Y-you, you're Makara!" Stuttered Mary.

"No, we are Makara" came the grinning reply.

"NO!, you're not real, you're a, a, puppet..." Mary's voice faded away.

"Hah! That's what you were supposed to believe, but you were always *my* puppet" Makara sneered.

"My destiny is to live again and again, for the Alliance, and my Master".

Mary felt her consciousness torn from her, she could feel a sensation of something on her left face. Her symbiote was speaking, it was a male voice, it was addressing someone...? She blacked out.

Scene 109:

Back in the operating room, Makara rose from the table. Her right eye closed and her Symbiote's eyes glowed red, it's mouth opened; "Imperial Master, I await your orders" a male voice, said.

A hologram of the Imperial Master appeared, "Excellent, the prophesy is complete, take your place in our Thalian forces, Commander Makara."

"By your divine guidance".

Scene 110:

The huge Alliance battle Cruiser swept it's sinister way through space, bristling with weapons and long thorny spikes protruding from it's menacing "head". At the helm, newly appointed Commander Makara was keen to show off her skills in battle. She stood atop her command lectern, eyeing her charges with mild disdain. Suddenly, she stood straight and still, her one remaining organic eye closed as her symbiote came to life, it's red eyes glowing as it spoke, "Imperial Master, I await your orders".

As if on cue, a holographic figure came into view above and in front of Makara. It was the terrifying figure of the Imperial Master.

“Commander Makara, you will travel to planet Deay in the Allusian zone, my information suggests an advanced race and mineral-rich planet, ripe for Imperial domination!”

“By your divine guidance”.

The hologram faded, the symbiote eye’s dimmed and Makara’s right eye opened. She turned towards her Captain and relayed her orders:

“Captain Hitari, set course for Allusian zone, lower quadrant, Hyper speed!”

Hitari replied in a tone less obedient than Makara would have liked:

“Allusian Zone, Lower Quadrant, Hyperspeed”, he ordered his attendant Termoids.

Their red eyes flashed as they bleated out their high-pitched replies.

Hitari did not like his new Commander, ordinarily that would not be much of an issue in the ordered ranks of the Thalian Army, but he was not so careful to conceal his disdain from her. If he had allowed his thoughts to wander, he would have hoped that their mission would end in failure, and he would be promoted to his rightful place as Commander.

Scene 111:

The enormous, powerful Kathaar class cruiser built up energy in it’s propulsion systems, quickly passing quantum speed and attaining Hyperspeed with a keenness due no doubt to its latest technology systems working at maximum output.

Scene 112:

It was not long before the Allusian zone was reached, and the advanced mode attack screens homed in on the lower quadrant, greedily searching out planet Deay. Makara waited impatiently as the planet honed into view on her large vidi-screen.

“Open a communication channel!” she snapped.

“Termoids, open multi-spread frequency channel, translator set to target vox readings” Hitari sneered at his soldiers. Makara had yet to hear Hitari acknowledge her divine guidance, and her patience, slim at the best of times was almost at an end. She looked at the tele-scanner and began her speech:

“Beings of Planet Deay, I am Commander Makara of the Imperial Alliance, I demand to speak to your superior!”

A beautiful young woman appeared on her screen “I am Princees Keeli, guardian of this planet and it’s people, we are peace-loving and mean you no harm”.

“Your planet is hereby annexed by the Imperial Alliance, you will turn over to us your finest physical specimens, ready to join our forces. We also declare rights to all your mineral wealth, your subjects will forthwith assist with mining the Allusian ore for the furtherment of the glorious Imperial Alliance!”

Scene 113:

Keeli hesitated for a brief moment, her planet’s primitive scanning technology had at least conveyed to her that this was no hollow boast, she feared for her people’s survival.

“Commander Makara, we are a gentle race, we have no warriors to offer you, but you are welcome to take whatever ore you wish”.

She should have known that appeasement does not work with tyrants.

“You do not have to offer us anything, we will take whatever we deem to be useful!”

Keeli secretly signalled to her people to begin evacuation to hidden underground chambers, originally built to withstand the meteorite bombardments, that had left her planet so rich in ore.

Scene 114:

Hitari’s long-range scanners noted the mass movement begin on the planet below, yet he did not alert his superior, due to the low respect he had for her.

“Maybe we will change your mind with a show of our power?” Makara haughtily scoffed.

“Hitari, launch carriers, attack sequence delta!”

“Attack sequence delta, by your orders”, and Hitari quickly left the bridge.

Makara monitored the attack fleet as it sped towards planet Deay. She did not trust Hitari at all.

“Lieutenant Orion, ready my personal attack craft” she quipped into a telecoms unit next to her command post.

“By your divine guidance” came the snivelling reply. The newly demoted Orion was keen to regain favour amongst the Imperial upper echelons.

Scene 115:

Makara boarded her sleek infiltrator craft, the two Termoid pilots sat impassively in front of her central cockpit position. She deftly operated her long range scanner and noticed that she had been right about Hitari’s treachery. Fuming with rage, she instructed her Termoid crew to take her to a lone temple-like structure, on the top of a mound near the city. Sure enough, as she approached, she saw mass crowds of Keeli’s subjects heading for the mound.

She screamed at Hitari, “You insolent fool, I will have you pay for this!”, as she watched Hitari’s main force pounding away at the other side of the sprawling metropolis, no-where near the fleeing Deayans.

“Gather at my co-ordinates, immediately!”

“Commander, I was simply carrying out orders”

“Silence! You will take a fighter and land at the edifice atop the hill at my co-ordinates”.

Makara wanted to be sure she was not caught in any “friendly fire” action instigated by Hitari.

She observed Hitari land and commanded her Termoid pilots to follow suit.

Scene 116:

She positioned the two armed Termoids at the entrance to the temple’s lower chamber, holding the panicking masses of Deay’s populace at bay.

Scene 117:

Entering the lower temple chamber, she immediately saw Hitari manhandling Keeli.

“Hitari, your treachery knows no bounds!” she screamed. “You will stop and obey my orders”.

“We should kill this insolent weakling now”, sneered Hitari his one yellow eye glowing with contempt for both women.

“No, I will make an example of her, and to all who dare resist the Imperial Alliance. Termoid 0177, bring the mask to me!”, she spoke into a communicator. “Orion, bring forth the xybydor”.

“By your divine guidance” came back a crackly reply.

Makara strode over to Keeli, her blood red eye wide open with frenzy.

“You should have acquiesced my dear, now you will pay the ultimate price. Hitari, do not move, I will deal with you shortly”. Hitari flinched, desperate to wrench control from the red-headed maniac in front of him.

“Princess Keeli, you will now observe the complete obliteration of your planet. It will be your eternal punishment for daring to try and trick me”, Makara spat at her.

Scene 118:

Orion arrived with a terrible spider-like creature on a glowing energy leash.

“Orion, program the xybydor, we want our captive to be comfortable for all eternity”, she cackled evilly.

“By your divine guidance” came Orion’s creepy reply.

“Hitari, hold her down!” snapped Makara, and as he did so, she placed a hideous mask over the beautiful Princess’ face.

“This will give you a grandstand view of your very own war, you pathetic peace-loving fool!” Makara cackled. Poor Keeli tried to scream but found she could not. The hideous xybydor approached her and cast her into a web, woven between two pillars in the underground entrance to the evacuation chambers. Hitari watched the hideous plan take shape, even he shuddered at Makara’s evil.

“We leave, Now!” Makara commanded.

Scene 119:

As they reached the surface, Makara spoke to Hitari:

“Seal the entrance!”

Hitari un-holstered his side-arm, and pointed it at the beam above the roofline and blasted. The energy weapon blew the lintel apart and the entrance disappeared under rubble. The Termoids began firing on the crowds to keep them back. Hitari took his moment, his weapon still in his hand, he span around to shoot Makara in the back, only to find her facing him, sword drawn.

“You are so pathetically predictable!” she sneered, and with a flourish drew her sword upwards, cutting Hitari completely in two. Sparks flew from his bionic implants, as his organic flesh quivered where it fell. Poor Orion nearly blew a fuse in his centipede implant. Expecting similar treatment, he put his arm up to shield his cowardly face. A smiling Makara turned to him:

“Do not fret *Captain* Orion, now call down our little surprise in the Imperial transport ship”.

“B-by y-your divine guidance” he stuttered, thinking that Keyro would not believe this tale.

Scene 120:

A large containership left the battle cruiser far above and honed in on Orion’s position, it hovered over the heaving masses of panicking citizens from Deay’s largest city, and dropped it’s cargo hold to the ground. The hold opened and hordes of evil-looking bug-eyed tanks and winged fighters disgorged onto the planet’s surface. As Makara’s ship headed back to the Kathaar cruiser, the sounds of war erupted on the planet below. Ploughing into the city, the marauding machines of war cut swathes of destruction as panic-stricken citizens had no-where to run. The endless war, watched helplessly by Princess Keeli, began it’s obliteration of her once-peaceful planet.

Scene 121:

Other similar planets could only look on in horror as Makara broadcast her demands of total capitulation towards each of them in turn. The Alliance was growing!

EP13:

Scene 122:

The Imperial Master was very pleased with his new Commander, if only he could have a few more of Makara's ilk... Her report, via her male-alter ego symbiote was enjoyable viewing for him. Considering the work involved in creating the first of the great Thalian Symbiotes, he surmised that it was worth the effort. They were not merely implants, to construct these new creations the Imperial Master had returned to his Thalian Planet homeworld and had imbued the initial device with part of the very essence of one of the Thalian elders that resided at the planet's core. The unrepentant evil that had been captured and held within the tiny face belied its corrupting powers on its host. Blessed with a sense of itself, it would be able to operate without direct input from the Imperial Master, and would guide and assist Makara's own twisted personality in carrying out the Master's orders more effectively than Thalian Commanders past. If successful, this would become a blueprint for his future elite commanding officers. He decided to test Makara some more...

Scene 123:

On board the victorious Battle Cruiser, Makara was in her private quarters. Thaliens still needed to replenish themselves, even if the ever efficient nanites had eked out the time available between recharging. The Imperial Master's familiar hologram appeared in her room, her symbiote immediately turned all attention to it, the cup of Thalian ale she was about to imbibe was held motionlessly to one side.

"Makara, you have done well, now it is time for us to defeat the Thalidians, remember, they have already proved themselves worthy in battle against us.

"We will not disappoint you, Imperial Master" came the almost monotone reply.

"Do not fail me, you would not wish to incur my wrath".

"By your divine guidance".

Scene 124:

As he broke off primary communications with Makara's symbiote, the Imperial Master noted that her unique bi-gendered make-up seemed particularly suited to the dual roles of symbiotic co-existence between bionic and organic.

He turned his attention to more pressing matters.

"Caliban, have you perfected the laser mental energy assimilatron?"

"It is *almost* ready to be tested, your Imperial highness".

"You have 100 parsecs!" he snapped.

"By your divine guidance" replied Caliban.

Scene 125:

Caliban turned to face poor Midia, her head completely covered by a device not that unlike the laser memory dissimilator.

"My dear, you will soon be providing us with all the information we need". He allowed himself a little chuckle as he got on with his gruesome task. Midia tried to scream, but found her voice unable to make any sounds, maybe she had already screamed herself hawse.

Scene 126:

Makara's victory over the Thalidians was as swift as it was brutal:

As her battle cruiser dropped out of hyperspeed, she relayed her tactics:

"Orion, slow to full impulse only, we will surprise them and pass through their outer defences."

Orion turned to the Termoid crew: "Maintain course, ahead full impulse", he commanded.

The huge ship's momentum blasted it through the outer mists of planet Thalide, and as expected, the advanced mode attack screens went blank.

"Shields up", Makara snapped.

"Shields!" repeated Orion, his words copied by Termoid bleats.

The cruiser charged into the inner atmosphere of Thalide, homing in on the last known co-ordinates of the main source of Thalidian defences, gleaned from the previous unsuccessful assault.

“Delta Laser, Now!” Shrieked Makara.

As the ship sped towards the planet’s surface, Orion began to panic, “D-delta laser?”.

The tip of Makara’s sword showed she meant business.

“F-fire Delta Laser!” uttered Orion.

The large weapon was hurriedly brought to the edge of the craft’s capacious maw, and a triangular blue bolt of energy was released forth.

“Now! Share ALL power, between shields and reverse thrust!” Screamed Makara.

Scene 127:

The Thalidians were caught totally unawares, their main flight defences struggling to get airborne. At close range the concentrated Delta Laser beam tore a huge gash through the very crust of the planet, a canyon appeared and the huge Kathaar class cruiser’s lights dimmed as it’s power surged to slow it’s descent, planetary rocks and debris were flung everywhere, and bounced off the ship’s shields as it used every last emi-milliton of the depth of the new canyon to slow down.

Scene 128:

On the bridge, the Termoids were thrown asunder, Orion hit his head, and Makara, a raging red tyrant, clung to her command post and screamed “Hold steady!”

An audacious and very risky attack, every last ounce of manoeuvrability that the vast vessel had to offer was used up, but work it did. The cruiser swooshed through the canyon it had created where once the Thalidian main defence force was housed. Slowing and turning to face the remaining disarrayed forces, as Makara hysterically bellowed:

“Orion, launch all carriers, full scale assault! Annihilate them all!”

Struggling to his feet, and genuinely scared of his Commander’s apparently totally insane streak, he literally ran from the bridge, issuing orders as he went.

Scene 129:

Soon enough, waves of attack craft piloted by slightly disoriented Termoids poured from the scuffed but still sound battle cruiser. If they were flustered, it was nothing to the panic and confusion of the remaining Thalidian forces they faced. The ensuing battle saw casualties on both sides, but ultimately, the Imperial Alliance had crushed its toughest foe to date.

Scene 130:

A defiant Makara made her report to the Imperial Master. Her symbiote relaying the results of the battle, also the tactics used to achieve them. The total daredevil nature of Makara’s plan being laid bare, the Imperial Master was less than impressed.

“Makara, you arrogant fool, you are no use to me and the Alliance if you are dead!”

“But we were victorious!”, retorted Makara, a rare outburst at her Master.

She was sent reeling back in her command post, as her symbiote relayed the Master’s disapproval at her insolence, through the medium of pain. She was caught off guard, luckily her symbiote was able to override her actions and grab the balcony rail and silence his other half.

“Imperial Master we beg forgiveness” the symbiote grovelled.

“Very well, but I will brook no more of these outbursts! Return to base Immediately”.

“By your divine guidance”.

Scene 131:

The huge craft altered it’s course and accelerated away at Hyperspeed, it’s harvester cells full of captured Thalidians ready for bionic implant and acculturation to the burgeoning Thalian forces.

Scene 132:

Back at the Imperial Master's fortress, sinister events were unfolding.

"Caliban, I have been patient enough! Activate the laser mental energy assimilatron, Now!"

In his gruesome lab, Caliban hurriedly rushed to complete his evil work of genius:

"I am ready, Great Master" he said, trying to hide the apprehension in his voice.

"Excellent, with this new device, I will be able to access untold minds many millitons away!" The Imperial Master waxed.

"Activate the device!"

"By your divine guidance", came the submissive reply.

Poor Midia was restrained with the vast machine poised over her, she had blacked out many times due to abject fear and malnutrition. With hindsight, her Thalian captives might have taken more care of their valuable asset had they known what was about to unfold. She began to black out again.

"Oh no you don't" smiled Caliban, and he reached for a dial and turned it slightly. This action caused a syringe to move, injecting more neural stimulant into Midia's frail body. Her eyes were forced wide open once more. Caliban turned to face a lever and grasping it, he pulled it towards him. Power cells began to charge the energy ray above Midia's head, as the power increased, a high-pitched whine made itself heard. The purple ray began to play down upon the magnification filter over Midia's forehead. The filter glowed orange, then red, then purple, as it attained it's infiltration frequency. Midia's feeble body writhed and her spine arched with pain, yet she made no sound, the assimilatron forced forth her incipient telepathic ability, and though connections to an outer transmitter/receiver array, projected the metaphysical beam out across the galaxy, directly towards the coordinates of the Planet Esper!

EP14:

Scene 133:

Some time had passed on Planet Esper, and an uncomfortable version of calm had descended, camouflaging the sense of fear that pervaded it's peoples. Deep in the underground hanger, the dashing Captain Corliss and his hand-picked team worked away to complete the Space Galleon, the Skull. At the prow of the ship, a sedate yet sinister figurehead of the ship's namesake impassively oversaw the great craft's completion.

Scene 134:

On the deck of the ship, a grubby worker mopped his brow before turning to his compatriot:

"We are so close, Captain, she is almost ready for her first test flight", thought the engineer, unable to conceal his enthusiasm.

"Patience my dear Engineer Marr, the time is near, I can sense it".

Climbing down from the deck, through the heart of the ship, the zealous engineering team members each greeted Corliss as he passed them, though no words were spoken. Exiting at the stern through an access hatch, Corliss approached his valued team leader Chief Dorrin. He gestured Dorrin to follow him out through the personnel doors of the hangar, into the underground corridor.

Scene 135:

"Please come with me, I must discuss with you a most urgent matter", he said. The mere fact that Corliss was speaking told Dorrin that discretion was needed, and he nodded as he followed his Captain. They continued down the underground passage, Corliss pausing briefly to look through the window of a passing door. Inside the room, his son Halley slumbered, safe and sound. Corliss smiled and turned to Dorrin, but before he could even think, Dorrin's thoughts were with him:

"My Captain, I would lay down my life to protect Halley, for he is special indeed, in so many ways".

"Thank you my dear friend", Corliss's words came through to Dorrin.

They neared the end of the corridor, and Corliss removed a small silver key from his black tunic. Placing it into a primitive-looking lock mechanism, he twisted it and the doors in front of them hissed open. Turning to Dorrin he quietly said:

"Sometimes, the oldest technologies are the most secure", and they both entered the chamber.

Scene 136:

This was no ordinary chamber, the first set of doors closed behind them, and they stepped through some kind of energy field towards a second set of heavier doors, lined with precious metals. Concealed motors whined as they strained to open the great doors. Corliss and Dorrin stepped through, and into a little known part of Esper's underground facility. As the doors closed behind them, low energy lamps began to warm up, revealing a small complex. The first room containing a computer plus datafile archiving system, the second larger room held a small workshop and prototype constructional facility. In the corner of this larger room, stacked on racks were what looked like sinister weapons, almost cannon-like in their appearance. In the centre of the room, taking pride of place was a twin-barrelled laser cannon, mounted on a turret.

"We are safe from prying minds here" smiled Corliss. "Welcome to my little insurance policy".

Dorrin let out a little gasp, such a weapons cache was, he felt sure, quite illegal within the Esperian society of today.

"Where did these come from?" he enquired.

"Oh, I've had some journeys, there's a big wide galaxy out there, beyond our little bubble here on Esper", Corliss almost drawled with pride.

"We need to get these fitted to the Skull, soon. I need you to get together your most trusted engineers, keep numbers to a minimum, I have a bad feeling we're going to need these".

"You can count on me sir", said a nodding Dorrin.

As they left the chamber, Corliss held back a little, stopping by to scoop up a small green case, next to the computer archive files, which he slipped into his tunic pocket.

Scene 137:

At the royal palace, preparations were being made to celebrate the latest arrival of the Pizaree family. Crowds gathered outside the palace, in the square, in fact everywhere that people could stand and group together. Bright flags bedecked buildings and bunting lined streets, there was a buzz that had been missing on Esper for a while. People chatted excitedly as they awaited the anticipated announcement. Would it be a boy or girl?, would everything go to plan? The Esperian people really needed this most royal of joyous ceremonies to raise their spirits.

Scene 138:

One royal subject who was not celebrating at all was the distraught Imila. Her beloved, only daughter had been missing for a while now, and despite the leading elders putting their highest mental energies into finding her, as yet there had been not the slightest trace. They could not even say if she was still alive. But Imila would know the answer to her question soon enough. She sat in an empty domicile, trying not to stare at Midia's artifacts, still littered about the place, as any carefree teenager would leave. She tried to fight back the tears, as she felt the great surge of energy present in the air, as the royal birth announcement drew ever closer.

Scene 139:

In an annex to the palace, the Kings most revered friend, the Seer, lay in a coma-like state, as ever attended by devoted courtiers, always hopeful that he would awake after the fateful predictions of the recent past. As a cry was heard in another part of the palace, his eyes flicked open. The attendant maid didn't notice at first, her mind elsewhere, but then he moved, only his arm at first then suddenly she did notice.

"My lord! You awake!" she cried in happiness.

The Seer clearly wanted to sit up, and she could not persuade him otherwise. As if gaining strength from a supernatural force, the frail old man got to his feet. He turned to the surprised girl and immediately she knew his thoughts:

"My child, I must speak with the King! It is most urgent. Please help to dress me".

Feeling his immense stubbornness, she quickly fetched his robes and summoned help. More attendants arrived, their brightly coloured robes signalling the special day that was taking place. The old Seer hobbled down the marbled hallways of the palace towards the King's chambers.

Scene 140:

As the throngs in the royal square waited, the crowds excitedly chatted by both speech and telepathy, when suddenly there was silence. The King appeared at the balcony overlooking his loyal subjects, he was holding a bundle of white blankets. Peeping out, seemingly with no fear were two beautiful blue eyes. They sparkled with a magic not seen on Esper for terra-parsecs.

"Behold, Princess Lamia!" he proudly proclaimed.

A huge cheer seemed to envelope the very ether of Esper, as the joyful crowds celebrated this most special of days.

Scene 141:

The King went back inside the palace, and was met by his old friend. He nearly dropped poor Lamia in surprise! The old man gestured for the King to bring her close to him, he closed his eyes and gave forth an amazing prophesy:

"This child is the most precious gift that the universe and the powers of good could bestow upon us all. For she will grow to become the saviour of all that is good, and at the dawn of the aligning of the planets, her destiny will be fulfilled and she will join with the most noble son of our strongest warrior, to rid the galaxy of evil for all time".

With that, the old man smiled and said "My time is near, my job is done, I bless you dear Lamia". He looked into the tiny baby's eyes, and then passing to an ethereal plane, he disappeared, his robes falling to the ground.

It was at times like these that the King needed all of his royal composure. Holding Lamia gently in his arms, he knelt at the spot where the Seer had stood, and said:

“Dear friend, now I know why you held on so long, your prophesy is safe, we will die to protect it”.

Sadly he was not aware of the Evil Imperial Alliances plans, or of how quickly events would now turn.

Scene 142:

In the days that followed on Esper, there was much rejoicing. Word spread by one method or another, of The Seer’s final prediction. In a society like Esper, how could it not? Imila felt the words of the Seer strongly. Though she tried to isolate herself from such thoughts, it seemed like they sought her out. As she lay in her bed, trying to go to sleep, ever hopeful that she would awake to find Midia was back with her again, she thought she felt Midia’s presence. “No, it cannot be”, she tried to shrug off the feelings, but they grew stronger. She sat up, silken sheets falling away from her slender body, “It, it is Midia” she felt her daughter was trying to contact her. She opened her mind and was for a moment lost, then pain, terrible pain! She screamed out, a hollow wail, almost alien in it’s composure, as the distorted trace of her poor daughter’s supernatural power became twisted and perverted into the abomination of the evil Alliance that it was. Unable to break free from the hold, her mind was raped for every scrap of information.

Scene 143:

On the Imperial Fortress, Caliban cautiously tried to preserve the integrity of the infiltration frequency.

“Master, our subject grows weak, we should desist”

“NO! Continue!” came the reply, as the Evil Imperial Master became totally absorbed watching the prophesy of his nemesis being slowly displayed on the screen. His depraved pleasure was all too quickly over however. It was as Caliban had feared, his device was still a prototype, this was its first ever test. He watched powerless as Midia’s life force was extinguished, her body became limp and lifeless, the beam still playing down on a cold body, that almost seemed to crumble away to dust and vanish before his very senses. Before any shred of remorse could infiltrate his cold soul, the Master suddenly snapped him back to the present.

“Caliban, what has happened?!” Came the thunderous voice through his implant.

He turned and switched off the assimilatron, composed his reply and said:

“Master, the Esperian has gone”.

“Gone?”

“Yes I do not understand it, O great one”.

Without the slightest pause, the Master snapped:

“No matter, we have our information, Caliban you have done well”.

“Through your divine guidance” Caliban replied.

Scene 144:

On Esper, Imila sat transfixed, almost petrified through the experience of sensing the death of her daughter, and the violation of her own mind.

The next day she was still sitting in the exact same poise, when her friend found her. Unable to even comprehend what had gone on, the shocked friend could do nothing but raise the alarm and hope that the authorities could help her stricken friend.

EP15:

Scene 145:

Onboard the speeding Imperial Battle Cruiser, huge repair and manufacturing facilities were working flat out to re-equip the ship with a full complement of fighters and carriers following the victorious battle with the Thalidians. Captain Orion was inspecting the new ships taking shape, when a thought crossed his mind. Admittedly this was not a very common occurrence, and his implant didn't seem to pay it much heed. One of the privileges of being a Captain allowed Orion a degree of semi-autonomous freedom. He had witnessed his commander's powerful yet slightly unhinged style of leadership, and had been genuinely afraid during the initial assault on Thalide. He therefore decided a little insurance plan was required, and approached a senior repair technician. Noting the rank of the approaching senior officer, the technician stopped and turned to face Orion, awaiting orders. In a sly tone of voice, Orion asked: "Sen Tech 325, are the repairs to carrier craft Z14 complete?"

"Repairs nearing completion Captain" came the monotone reply.

Orion had always had an affinity for carrier Z14, and came to regard it as "his" personal craft. Indeed it was always the one he used when going into battle, even if he was mostly at the rear of any spearheaded assault.

"Good, I have been authorised by my superiors to request an upgrade of the propulsion systems on this craft" he quietly ventured.

"What upgrades are required?" came the mechanical reply.

"I require the ability to operate the craft at velocities above hyperspeed", Orion stated confidently.

"No such upgrades are available", came the disappointing reply.

"You must divert some resource onto this project, it *must* be possible", Orion persisted.

"We will attempt to comply, by your divine guidance".

Relieved, Orion watched the technician go on it's way. He needed to be able to look after his own cowardly psyche, and having a fast exit strategy always appealed to Orion.

He felt the cruiser suddenly alter it's course and realised he had better get back to the bridge,

Scene 146:

Commander Makara stood atop her high lectern, her red eye glinting with impatience as Orion tried to sneak back into his position on the bridge.

"Orion! Where have you been? She snapped.

"Commander, I was merely..." he was cut short.

"Never mind! Our Imperial Master has given us a new mission, we must forthwith make all speed to the Planet Esper, and demand the surrender of a great power, a power that I sense the Imperial Master himself fears. A power that he has designated the F-01!"

"F-01 commander? I have never heard of it" ventured Orion.

"No", mused Makara, "I suspect it is a code of some sort. The Master must want it's true nature to be known only to him at this moment". She paused, "Knowledge is power Orion" and smiled a devious smile.

Orion turned to his Termoid crew and ordered:

"Set course for Planet Esper, zone 112Delta, lower quadrant"

"Zone 112Delta, Lower quadrant" came back the subservient replies.

"Hyperspeed!" snarled Makara, with an evil grin.

As she stood at the huge ship's command post, her organic left hand began drumming out a rhythm. She stared down at it in mild disbelief for a moment, before a quick thought and the drumming ceased. She pondered on the whys and wherefores of this before turning her attention back to the task in hand.

Scene 147:

On Esper, the King was very worried, he called an emergency meeting of the Esperian Elders. They gathered in the vaulted stone room, around the ancient table as usual, but they had all picked up on the King's extreme anxiety.

“Esteemed elders, I have grave news. It seems our very society has been violated in a most despicable way”, his thoughts briefly turned to the stricken Imila, who even now, was lying motionless, in some sort of trance, in the King’s own medical chambers.

“A terrible power of immense evil has fashioned a device of some kind that can harness our very telepathic abilities”, he paused as a gasp went out around the table.

“From what I am able to ascertain, from the shattered remains of her mind, a woman called Imila, who you may remember as the mother of Midia, the young girl kidnapped by an unknown hostile race, was somehow visited by her daughter’s thoughts. We are unsure of how this was possible, but she of course opened her mind to her child and was then mentally assailed by some form of tyrant. It seems they were able to access her thoughts through her link with her daughter. I can only assume that these beings, or whatever they are, now know about the Seer’s final prophesy”.

There was silence, as the assembled ancients struggled to take in what the King was telling them.

Suddenly, the main doors to the chamber were flung open and Captain Corliss strode in.

“My liege, respected elders, please accept my apologies, I came as soon as I could”.

“Please, be seated Corliss”, said the King.

The Captain was quickly brought up to speed on the events and indicated he wanted to speak:

“We have little time, we must act to protect Lamia, if the Prophecy is true, it is she who will be able to protect us and the galaxy from the evil that we all feel is spreading out towards us, consuming all in its path”.

“For once I am in agreement with you Corliss” sighed the King. “What else can we do?”

The Chief Advisor then spoke:

“Dear assembled friends, we should use our very abilities to ascertain the level of threat we are under. It would do us no favours to overreact to this threat”.

“I cannot dismiss your counsel dear friend”, said the King. “Therefore we will employ both tactics. Corliss, you must ready your ship as soon as you can, as a last resort you must protect Lamia above all else. Chief Advisor, you will set up a watch and send out thoughts to try to gain us valuable information on our foes and their next moves. Above all, we must appear to act normally and guard our thoughts against further infiltrations”.

Another advisor turned to the King: “My Lord, we will do all we can, but what of Midia?”

The king dropped his head for a moment and said quietly “I’m afraid I suspect the worst, I fear her bright light has already been extinguished in this battle”.

With that, the assembly disbanded, hurrying away to an unknown fate.

Scene 148:

Corliss hurried back to the huge underground hangar, the various security systems and elevator not working nearly fast enough for him. He strode into the busy hangar, where the small team was completing the final work on attaching the weapons systems. He stood in front of the huge galleon’s skull-shaped prow:

“Colleagues”, he announced. “The time is upon us, time to act, time to face an enemy the likes of which we have never faced before. The very existence of Esper and all things precious in the galaxy now depend on us”.

He sensed that his assembled crew were as ready as they would ever be, and felt cheers surge back to him from each and every one of his brave band. He turned and quickly made his way to where his young son Halley sat, playing quietly in his room.

Scene 149:

“Halley my dear son, we are going on a great adventure!”

“Yes father, I am ready”, said Halley seriously.

“Come, let us board the Skull!”

Scene 150:

In his fortress planet, the Evil Imperial Master observed his battleplan unfolding, just as he had hoped. It had been as the Seer had predicted, the appearance of Makara, the “Angel of death” had spurred his armies into ever fiercer

battles. As new Kathaar class battle cruisers came on line, news of Makara's victories had spread through his troops, infusing his commanders with a renewed vigour to conquer all. His empire was spreading, he could feel the total domination he so desired was getting ever closer. All he needed now was to get hold of the final piece of the puzzle, the embryonic force of good, and quell its powers thus allowing him total domination. He felt sure his new commander would not let him down.

Scene 151:

Far away from all of this, a young professor Hagen was enjoying the peace of the Mars advanced research centre. He was finally feeling that conditions around him were right for him to be able to make the advances he felt that he should be making. He had no way of knowing just how true that feeling was. For him, life was seemingly going well, he had been able to secure the posting of his close female friend Annalee H'ari, to the Mars institute. As time passed on Mars the two of them had grown closer, although Annalee had always felt that Subaru's work was uppermost in his mind. She dreamed of a happy life for them, and they had enjoyed many freedoms on Mars. Indeed, she now had something very important to tell Subaru, but was finding it difficult to pick the right time. Eventually, she could contain herself no longer, and so as they sat in Subaru's habitation quarters, drinks in hand, she picked her moment. Subaru was as usual talking about the latest advancements he had made with his work, when Annalee touched him on the arm:

"Subaro dear, I have something to tell you", she softly ventured.

He paused, wondering if she had been listening to him at all, and turning to her, sensed a strong feeling coming through her gaze.

"Are you ill my dear? What troubles you?"

"No, no" she smiled, "I am not ill, the opposite in fact. We have been blessed Subaro, I am pregnant".

Subaro stopped breathing for a moment, blinked and tried to regain his composure.

"Did you hear me my dear?"

"Y-yes, you are expecting a child..."

"No, *our* child Subaro".

"I-I am lost for words, erm, that is indeed great news".

Annalee was hoping for a slightly more emotional response, and her pulse quickened even further, but now with some panic entwined with the joy.

"Are you not happy my dear? We could bring the child up together, here, on Mars".

"Y-Yes, erm, m-my work... I had no idea, forgive me, I must take this in".

He stood up and said: "Please excuse me, I have to think" and quickly left the quarters. Annalee sat there, in mild disbelief, she had known he was a bit work obsessed, but this was his Child for goodness sake! She determined to show Subaru that it could work, and that he could be a happy and loving father, her emotions convinced her of this, blinding her to anything she could not countenance.

Scene 152:

On the balcony overlooking the vast red wasteland of Mars, where he had first stood, Subaru could not accept the enormity of what Annalee had told him. He was not ready for a family, his work was everything to him. He cursed his lapses of dedication to his cause, remembering the brief embraces he had had with Annalee, the primordial lust that had overtaken his normally restrained mind, he had indeed fallen for the tender trap.

EP16:

Scene 153:

Mary slowly became aware of herself. She tried to open her eyes, but found that the mental connection she once had to them seemed to be missing. Indeed, she was only really aware of herself on a purely non-physical level. She tried to gather her thoughts together and became conscious of changes. Some good, some bad. Her mind finally felt free of all the anguish and blackness and hatred that had so dominated her life for so long, yet she was also without any real senses. No vision, touch, smell, nothing. She began to wonder if she had in fact died and was in some kind of afterlife. Slowly she began to piece together events leading up to this moment. She remembered being with her friend Pippa, yes that's right, Greece, they were on holiday. Then she remembered the ruined temple, the bright white light, the pain, explosions. Her arm! It had been badly damaged, but now she had no feeling of any limbs at all. Nagging shards of memory began to appear, had she been in an operating theatre? Maybe she had died on the table there? No, there was something else, someone else. Her life flashed before her eyes in an instant, someone had been there for as long as she could remember, someone bad. A vague image began to appear, a red-haired tyrant, a devil maybe? Had she been possessed? She tried to cry out, tried to move, something was terribly wrong, she needed to get her senses back...

Scene 154:

On the bridge of the speeding Kathaar class cruiser, Commander Makara stood, impatiently observing the advance mode attack screens. She was formulating her next strategy, Planet Esper, the race of Mystics, she knew she must wipe them out, but she had to acquire the F-01 for her Master. She would brook no bargaining, an attack force would be launched as soon as possible. They must feel her power and kneel before the might of the Alliance. Suddenly, she became aware of something, something awakening from within. She signalled to her symbiont to take over, it's red eyes flickered as her own organic eye closed. So the pathetic human had started to come around...

Scene 155:

On Esper, the group of Elders sat, impassively waiting, searching, feeling out, as the King had requested. There were no specifics, they sensed a great prevailing danger, but they were no closer to identifying what was going to happen. All the time they were mindful, fearful even, of the words of the great Seer. The white marble room in which they sat, so cold, so clean, so unrevealing, in many ways a metaphor for what they were themselves feeling. Then, oh so slight, just a faint flicker, then others felt it, a great force, and evil force was approaching very rapidly. They sensed danger, death, destruction. The signals were beginning to come through, they must alert the King!

Scene 156:

Captain Corliss felt his close friend and ally, the King of Esper himself; send out his thoughts directly to him:

"Corliss dear friend, they approach, it is as the Seer foretold. We must protect Lamia, she must be allowed to escape, they must suspect nothing, you have to take her, now!"

"I am on my way, my King" he replied.

Scene 157:

In the King's private rooms, His highness sat with the Queen and Lamia. Lamia was so peaceful, so wonderful; she had such a calming aura. He looked into her eyes and could somehow feel that what he was about to do, she understood. This was unheard of in such an infant on Esper. He knelt and faced the Queen, seated with Lamia in her arms:

It is time my love, we must protect her, we cannot let this shining light be extinguished by the unspeakable evil that approaches".

The Queen looked at him, her eyes full of tears, she knew he spoke the truth, yet she loved Lamia so dearly, how could she live with herself, knowing she gave her own daughter away to a life of hiding and running.

"I know, it is hard for us both", sensed the King, knowing her thoughts, for they were his as well.

Lamia beamed at her mother and smiled, her eyes shining like jewels. The Queen gazed back, trying to smile, trying to make the moment last for an eternity, imprinting it on her mind as she seemed to know it would be the last time she would look upon her daughter.

There was a knock at the door, it was Captain Corliss. He entered alone, nodding to them both. The King and Queen stood together and turned to face the dashing captain. No words were spoken.

“It is time my lord, m’lady” they picked up on his thoughts.

The King placed his arm around the Queen, as she reluctantly handed over the little bundle of love she had so briefly been able to treasure. Corliss took the baby; all wrapped up in it’s white swaddling cloth. Immediately, he felt a strong feeling of love and warmth, such was Lamia’s immense presence already, truly incredible for one so young. He smiled at her, and she beamed back at him. He immediately knew he would die for her if he had to. The King and Queen felt that too, and soon Corliss was heading swiftly for the underground hangar once again.

Scene 158:

Away in the wilderness of uncharted Esper, Lamia’s powers were having an effect on another creature. The primordial inhabitants of Esper, outdating the humanoid mystics by many demi-parsecs were the Kirree. Very shy and secluded creatures, they lived in the remotest parts of the planet, and held an almost delphian fascination and reverence amongst the Esperian society. Said to bring good luck if they were ever sighted, yet due to their very nature, they were virtually unseen by all but the eldest inhabitants. One such creature stopped it’s foraging and stood up and gave out a loud gruff grunting noise, before scampering away at a pace belying it’s bulk. It had heard Lamia’s calling and knew it had to go to her. Racing across the swampy ground with an ancient agility, it sped towards the outskirts of Esperia, unknowing its fate, unquestioning in it’s reasoning, obeying its heart.

Scene 159:

Mary was suddenly aware of a voice, it had no source, it was everywhere.

“So you are still here”, it said. She recognised the shrill tones:

“Makara!, what have you done to me?, where am I?”

“Now you will know what it is like to spend an eternity in darkness, unable to free yourself. Just as I myself once knew”. Makara sneered. “You are nowhere, you are nothing, there is nothing you can do, you will remain here for ever, Ha ha ha ha haaaaa!” She cackled.

“Helllp!” Screamed Mary.

“Hah! There’s no point in shouting , no-one can hear you. Your time is over, my time has come. You were merely a vessel which I occupied, until I was strong enough, and the time and place were once again right”.

“How?, how did I get here?”

“You disappoint me, did you not once admire me? Did you not once let me in?”

“But that was so long ago, you weren’t real”.

“Wasn’t I? Did you not make me real? Did you not feel anything?”

“I-I felt the blackness, the hatred, the depression, w-was that you?”

“You were so malleable my dear, you helped me in so many ways, you even changed your body...”

“NO! That was my decision, I tried to kill you!”

“Ha ha, so wonderful, you tried, but you made me stronger. I offered you the ultimate body, you had the best of both worlds thanks to me!”

“I am NOT you, I will never be you, your heart is so empty, I can feel it.”

“Hah! I need no heart, that you can have, it will keep you company for eternity, Goodbye Mary!”

“W-wait, aieeee.....”

Scene 160:

On the bridge of the Kathaar class ship, Commander Makara’s symbiote was watching the advance mode attack screens, waiting patiently for Esper to appear. Suddenly Makara’s body shook slightly, and her single organic eye opened and once again, she was looking out at the view she had waited so long to see, to feel, to be.

“Orion, where is this planet?” she demanded.

“M-my commander, it is soon in range, another milli-parsec or so”, he offered.

“Hrmm! Well, ready your attack fleet, I want no mercy shown to them”.

“By your divine guidance”.

Suddenly the advance mode attack screens flickered, Makara sensed the time was near, she could almost taste the death she so longed to dispense.

“Slow to half impulse, launch carriers when in range!” she ordered.

Orion was already on his way to Carrier Z14, as he felt the commands flow through his implant.

Soon, hordes of attack craft were spilling forth from the battle cruiser’s launching mouth.

Scene 161:

On Esper, the alarm was sounded, people began to run for cover. The Elders beamed out in their strongest elemental voices possible: “They are here, beware the words of the Seer!”

On the Royal balcony, the King and Queen waited impassively and steadfastly for their fate. They knew that strength against their terrible foe was shown in standing firm to the very last.

Scene 162:

In the underground hangar, the crew of The Skull were frantically removing all tethers from the hull, powering up the stellar engines and manning all battlestations.

Scene 163:

The side of a slope some distance away from the secret entrance began to crumble, and sink. Long unused mechanisms groaned and creaked into life as shards of light began to seep through the roof of the hangar. Debris and soil fell onto the great galleon, as the first rays of light began to play upon her delicate solar sails. The light from the Esperian sun instantly breathing life into the mighty ship.

Scene 164:

Captain Corliss was ready at the helm, his brave crew beside him. In a room shielded and armoured deep within the vessel, lay the tiny Lamia, and also Halley. For a young boy, a time such as this would have been quite scary, yet he quietly sat with Lamia in a cot next to him, her aura of serenity enveloping him in calmness and peace.

Scene 165:

The hillside slipped away, to reveal the Skull in all its silvery glory, just as the Kirree creature approached. Looking at the sight before it, the ancient creature watched as the ship began to rise. It ran and leapt, a mighty effort from an exhausted body, its strong arms just gripped the bow of the ship, and wrapped themselves around the Skull’s head itself. It had made it!

Scene 166:

Down in the control room, Corliss silently commanded:

“Main engines to lift, sails to the sun, we need all the power we can get”.

“Yes Captain!” excited replies came back.

In all the haste and action, none of the crew, not even Corliss noticed the Kirree. Hanging on for dear life.

EP17:

Scene 167:

Laser torpedoes rained down on Esper, ancient and modern buildings alike were blown apart. The great and gentle civilisation was literally being torn asunder. Orion's forces were concentrating their firepower on the outskirts of the vast city below them.

Scene 168:

Above, aboard the battle cruiser, Makara watched this all with glee. Her symbiont's eyes flickered and immediately she was re-aware that her primary mission was not one of destruction. She spoke into the telecommunicator next to her overhead display screen:

"Orion, break off the attack! Re-group and await my orders".

Brimming with over-confidence she turned to the Termoid crew below her and said:

"Open a communication channel!"

"Opening channel, opening channel" came the almost moronic replies.

"Beings of planet Esper, I demand to speak to your governor!"

On her screen, a hazy view of the King and Queen appeared:

"I am King Balthazaar, of the Esperian Race, this is Queen Zalina. Call off your attack, we are unarmed!"

"I give the orders!" Snapped Makara. "I am Commander Makara of the Imperial Alliance".

The King winced slightly at her name, the Seer was right, this was their Angel of Death!

"You will hand over to me the force known as the F-01".

"Certainly, said the King, but you must collect it yourself, we cannot move it without help".

Taken aback slightly by this answer, Makara re-thought her strategy.

"Give me the location!" she demanded.

"But of course", said the King, all the time buying precious parsecs for The Skull to prepare it's escape.

"It is held here, in the royal palace, deep within it's vaults."

"I warn you" snapped Makara. "If you trick me you will pay for it with your life".

"Orion, send an away force to the source of the transmission, I want you to handle this personally".

"By your divine guidance", came the snivelling reply.

Scene 169:

Red beams of energy shone down onto the palace grounds. The royal courtiers, standing by their King and Queen, gasped in horror at the grotesque forms of the invaders who materialised in front of them. Two Termoids walked ahead of Captain Orion, who proudly strutted along, like he was running the show. The reptilian party approached the King, and he gestured for the Queen to stay back. Orion sneered:

"I am Captain Orion of the Imperial Alliance. You will take me to the F-01 now, and no tricks!"

"Follow me", gushed the King.

Scene 170:

As the party entered the palace, shocked Esperians stood to one side as the King led the gruesome aliens ever deeper into the building.

On the battle cruiser, Makara sensed trickery and sent a signal to Orion's implant, via her symbiont, to stop and demand the hand over of the F-01 or watch the execution of his entire court. Orion stopped in his tracks, the King sensed the game was up, and mentally signalled to Captain Corliss: "NOW!"

Scene 171:

On The Skull, Corliss relayed his orders to his crew:

"Maximum power to main engines! Climb away from the city".

The sleek brig broke cover and let it's sails gather the suns rays as it's main Impulse engines charged up and thrust the ship up and away towards the bright Esperian sky. Corliss took one last look at the planet he so loved and concentrated on his mission, to protect Lamia at all costs.

Scene 172:

On Makara's cruiser, the advanced mode attack screens relayed the sudden movement of a ship with an urgent bleeping. As the Termoids broadcast the turn of events to Makara, she screamed with rage:

"Orion it was a trick, get back to your craft now!"

Scene 173:

"At once commander" came his surprised reply. The King ran forward to stop him, the Termoids turned and shots began to fill the corridor.

"Back to the ships!" yelled Orion, "Shoot anyone in your way!"

They rushed back to the surface, where their transporter beams could pick them up.

Scene 174:

A furious Makara yelled "All ships attack, annihilate them all!"

The Alliance carriers and fighters at once re-started their attack, blasting at the Esperian city below them.

Poor Orion had barely enough time to return to his ship before destruction rained down on the palace.

Scene 175:

In the marble corridor below, the King sighed as he lay, cradled in the Queen's arms. Shot in the ensuing scuffle, he smiled up at the Queen, and she, using all her self-restraint, smiled back. His life slipping away, he could feel the Ancient Elders calling to him. He had paid the ultimate price for his incredible bravery.

Scene 176:

The Skull picked up speed as the explosions of the Imperial weaponry rocked the very ground of Esper. Breaking free of the planetary hold, the solar winds played upon the great sails, filling them with energy.

"Hyperspeed, as soon as you can" ordered Corliss.

Scene 177:

The great Imperial battle cruiser tried to turn its huge hulk around to give chase. Makara realised she had been outmanoeuvred, to give chase would have meant leaving her force marooned on Esper. In her rage she uttered:

"Orion, use all available weapons, obliterate them!"

"By your divine guidance", came the whimpering reply.

Hell opened over the skies of Esperia, the fighters and carriers let rip with all the might of the Alliance's power.

The once great city was laid to ruin.

Losing composure, Makara ordered Orion to return to the cruiser.

"Now we will finish the job with the Delta laser!" she cried.

Orion hastily called his force back to the Kathaar's launch pad before the Delta laser was brought to the ship's spiky lips.

Scene 178:

As Esper fell in a blaze of fire and brimstone, the royal palace was vaporised in an instant. The King and Queen holding each other to the very last, their ascent to Esperian spirituality assured.

Scene 179:

Corliss at once felt a huge pain, he was waiting for it, but as his craft had passed by Makara's death-ship, he also felt another, distant but very familiar essence. He knew it from another time and place, his great guilt rose up from the depths of his mind and tore into him. A skeleton from his past had come back to haunt him. He knew that he must make amends somehow. He must right his wrongs and free his past lover from her torture.

"All speed towards Earth" he said. It was time to bring the great prophecies onto the side of good. He knew that the planet of men which the Seer had spoken of, was the one last hiding place he could pick. Far from the Alliance' spread of power, and just enough of a backwater to possibly escape detection.

Scene 180:

Above the burning remains of Esper, the huge Imperial battle cruiser turned and immense engines powered up. On the bridge, the familiar yet terrible image of the Imperial Master appeared in front of Makara. Slightly faded due to the huge distance it had travelled, the hologram spoke with a thunderous rage:

“Commander Makara! Where is the F-01? Why is it not aboard your ship?”

Makara’s symbiote bowed her head and spoke with it’s deep flat male tones:

“Imperial Master, we were tricked by the Esperians, but they are no more. I promise you, we will soon have the F-01 within our grasp. Already we are tracking it through space...”

“Enough excuses! I want results, or I will have your head!”

“We will not disappoint you again, great Master”.

“I will not tolerate failure Makara, resume your mission”.

“By your divine guidance”.

The terrifying image rescinded and the symbiote’s eyes dimmed. Makara raised her head and turned to Orion:

“It will not be just my head the Imperial Master will have!” she seethed.

Orion quivered. He felt scared inside, but also, despite all his fears, he was completely in awe of his commander. He was totally under her spell, and determined himself to prove her wrong about him, he so wanted her respect. Poor Orion, was this the closest he could ever come to having any emotions for another being?

He turned to his Termoid crew:

“Use our long range laser scanners, we will track the solar wind disruption of their craft”.

“Long range scanners in operation”, came the subservient Termoid replies.

The vast ship sped after the Skull, and Makara gripped the rail of her command balcony. “They can’t outrun us forever” she reasoned.

Scene 181:

On board The Skull, the brave Captain Corliss retired to his private quarters for a brief respite. He picked up a bottle and poured himself some fine Esperian blend and looking into the deep yellow colour of the liquid, he realised that it was one of the last times he would taste such a beverage. He knew his mission, he had to shake off the Alliance and that tyrant Makara, and deliver Lamia safely to the peoples of the earth. But another nagging vision plagued his mind, he remembered his interstellar time-spanning voyages from his past. He knew the appearance of Makara meant his fears had been realised, his once love had fallen to the inducement of the evil presence that had possessed her. He had tried to lead her to the light and had failed and had run. His own weaknesses and fears had crushed a once proud man. It was a personal hell he had carried for ever since, ruing the day that it would come back to haunt him. That day was today. He had to end this, somehow. He summoned his next-in-command, Dorrin to his room.

“Captain, you called for me?”

“Yes Dorrin, it is time to put my plan into practise. We must ready the capsule”.

“Yes Captain Corliss” said Dorrin efficiently.

“I know I don’t need to ask, but if I have to leave, please ask no questions, and keep my son safe, his destiny is as important as Lamia’s. All things are happening as the great Seer had predicted. Halley has a great role to play in future events, he will come to realise this, through your guidance and love. He must see the great aligning of planets that approaches by the k-parsec”.

Shocked and afraid of his Captain’s words, Dorrin could do no more than nod.

Scene 182:

The sleek white capsule was duly prepared for it’s special cargo, and as the infant Lamia lay, her powers began to have effects that would be far reaching indeed. Her mind’s essence began to prepare an insurance policy all of it’s own. Still clinging onto the bow of the great ship was the Kirree stowaway, patiently awaiting Lamia’s next instructions.

EP18:

Scene 183:

Many Millitons away, In his lab on the Mars Research Institute, Professor Hagen was struggling to cope with how his life seemed to be panning out. Always the scientist, dedicated, controlled, convinced of the validity of his work to develop future defences for the protection of the Earth through EDF, he just couldn't abide any distractions. One such distraction that he could not avoid, try as he might, was the impending birth of his child. Relations were strained between him and Annalee, to say the least. A child was the last thing he needed at the moment.

Scene 184:

In the habitation quarters, Annalee held back her tears once again, as Subaru's contactor was still set to "busy". He was always "busy", she could not seem to get through to him like she used to. He had become more obsessed with his work than ever. She knew her child was due very soon, as she felt her baby move and kick again. She resolved to be the best parent she could ever be, she did not need Subaru. She felt her baby was special, and knew that one day, Subaru would feel the same way too. Later on, the medi-team were whisking Annalee to the research institute's own state of the art facility. Her baby was on its way, where was Subaru?

Scene 185:

Far away, in time and space, Captain Corliss was preparing for his desperate plan to come into play. His ship was running at maximum velocity, every last ounce of power was being coaxed from the tall sails as they caught the solar winds.

"We must go where the winds take us, we cannot tack, we need all the time we can get" Corliss commanded his crew.

"We act by your orders, Captain" came back the replies.

"It is soon time to launch the capsule, I will prepare Lamia for her journey.

Scene 186:

With that, Corliss went straight to the heart of the ship, to the secure room where Halley and Lamia lay sleeping. He checked to make sure his son was sound asleep, and gently picked up the tiny Lamia, wrapped her in warm coverlets. Looking down at the tiny infant, he knew that she would look so different when she had grown into a young woman, by the time of the great aligning of planets. The question of how to recognise Lamia in many centi-parsecs time may pose a problem, and Corliss knew how it might be overcome. Lying in an antique bejewelled box hidden in the secure room was a special pendant. It's centre stone twinkled with the blue of Lamia's eyes. Removing it from its royal resting place, the brave Captain gently placed it within the folds of the precious infant's blankets.

"There, this will keep you safe until we meet again", he gently said to Lamia, before carrying her to the capsule launching bay.

Scene 187:

Inside the bay, lay the sleek white pod. It was quite large for the package it had to carry, in order to hold all the supplies Lamia might need on her journey. The propulsion system was very special, a multi-layered impulse drive, one of Corliss's many technological advances that he had worked on and gathered from his time-spanning journeys throughout the galaxy. There were many other ideas, weapons and systems that he had longed to develop, yet they still remained as mere prototype plans. He activated the clear canopy and it slid open, to reveal a soft bed. He gazed down at Lamia and her beautiful deep sparkling blue eyes met his, completely unafraid, she was even now, so peaceful. Corliss struggled to tear himself away from the infant. He forced a smile and gently laid her in her own tiny spaceship. He paused for a moment, and then took the small green case from within his tunic pocket. It was full of plans of advanced weaponry and ships that he had hoped himself to one day perfect. He knew now, that that time would never come, and so hoped that whoever took Lamia in, might be able to use them to protect her, and themselves, from any Alliance attacks. Corliss slipped the case, written in the most basic code he could

achieve, into the capsule. As the canopy slid closed, he hoped he was doing the right thing. His hand touched the smooth clear window and he turned away, to face his own uncertain fate.

Scene 188:

Back in the control room of The Skull, Corliss gave his orders:

“Brave crew, we need to slow the ship down in order to safely launch the capsule. Once this has been done, we must engage the Alliance forces to try to draw them away from it’s trail. I cannot guarantee that all of you will survive, but of the validity of our mission and actions, I have no doubts at all”.

With that, the speeding craft began to slow and turn, to begin the capsule launching sequence.

Scene 189:

On board the Alliance cruiser, Makara hungrily observed the advanced mode attack screens. Her Termoid crew carefully scanning for any signs of the space galleon, The Skull. Suddenly there was a small contact, then a blip.

“Contact” relayed the ever-watchful Termoids.

“Ahaaa! At last we have them!” Enthused Makara. “Captain Orion, ready a welcoming party, we don’t want them to escape this time”.

“By your divine guidance” came his subservient reply.

Scene 190:

As The Skull slowed, a side hatch opened to reveal the sleek white capsule. At that moment, The Kirree made it’s move. Using strong arms it swung down from it’s hiding perch and took a daredevil leap down the side of the imposing silver ship. It worked! Deftly landing in the launching bay area, the Kirree approached the pod and it’s yellow eyes finally met Lamia’s. It knew it’s destiny was to protect her, and maybe even die for her. The clear canopy of the pod slid open and the Kirree climbed in, there was just enough room for it to lie next to Lamia. The canopy quickly shut again, and the systems came on-line.

Scene 191:

In the control room, Corliss noticed a strange reading in the capsule launch bay. He was about to go and investigate when alarms sounded in his ears.

“Captain, the Alliance are approaching!”

“Launch the pod now!” He commanded.

Scene 192:

The pod’s multi-layered impulse engines began to come to life for the very first time. The clamps around the capsule shot away and it finally floated free, compressed gas pushed it out into space and oriented the craft for main impulse fire. Corliss donned his visor and went up on deck to view the craft for the last time. The capsule’s initial level impulse engine fired and with a searing white light, the pod was whisked away into the black vastness of space. Corliss watched it go for a moment before climbing up onto the large imposing turret cannon control stand, and unlocked the security mechanism on the fearsome dual-barrelled weapon with a deft flick of his fingers over the control keypad. He knew his time had come.

Scene 193:

Termoid #2110 noticed a tiny trace streak away from the main laser scan paint. He relayed it to Orion:

“Possible energy discharge from target ship, unable to ascertain”.

Orion gulped as he braced himself to inform Makara:

“Commander, we have detected an energy signature, moving away from the Esperian ship with speed”.

“Whaaat?!” Shouted Makara, torn away from her fix on the approaching Galleon. “It must be some kind of escape pod, quickly use the laser scanner to plot the drive signature of the source”.

“We have a basic track, Commander, but the capsule has quickly made hyperspeed”.

“We have been tricked again...aagh?!”

She was suddenly cut short in disbelief as the cruiser was rocked by incoming fire... from The Skull!

“Orion! Silence their weapons, launch a counter offensive!”

“At once Commander”, said Orion, already ordering his attack.

“Launch attack formation Theta” he quipped to his Termiod crew, as the elevatron whisked him away to his carrier ship.

Scene 194:

On the Skull, Corliss gave the command to fire at the huge cruiser. The Skull’s untested weapons blasted blue rays of energy at the Kathaar class ship, causing minimal damage to it’s heavy armour. He swung the powerful cannons at the approaching Thalian fighters and fired for all he was worth. His skill in battle quickly becoming apparent, as the Alliance fighters sustained damage from his well-aimed shots. He signalled to his crew, “Charge up main engines, ready to retreat on my command!”

“Ready Captain”, came the reply.

Corliss fought bravely, but he knew his ship was no match for the gigantic Imperial battle cruiser. As waves of fighters broke through his line of fire, he prepared himself mentally for his last journey.

“Now Dorrin! To hyperspeed!” he commanded.

Scene 195:

Remembering his Captain’s earlier wishes, Dorrin ignited the main impulse engines and bought the sails into the solar wind. Corliss’s words were etched into his mind as they were the last words Dorrin heard his Captain speak.

Scene 196:

On the deck of the Skull, a volley of Alliance fire from Orion’s attack force ripped into the superstructure. Corliss closed his eyes and focussed his entire mental energies on the feint feeling he first sensed as Makara’s ship had neared him. As laser torpedoes tore into the brave Captain’s body, he was suddenly at one with the ethereal forces his Esperian ancestry revealed.

Scene 197:

Dorrin felt his Captain’s very life force depart the ship, as the explosions rocked the hull to it’s core. He sensed that his charge, Halley, was scared and gestured to his next-in-command to take over the helm. Dorrin rushed to Halley’s room and tried to comfort the distraught boy as best he could. The twin propulsion systems of impulse and solar literally picked The Skull up and swept it away from Orion’s forces.

Scene 198:

“Commander, they are trying to escape”, panicked Orion.

“Leave them!” She snapped, “It is a ruse, we must pursue our primary objective, I feel sure that the F-01 is not aboard the Esperian Galleon, we must chase down that energy signature. Return to me at once!”

“By your divine guidance”.

Scene 199:

The speeding capsule catapulted Lamia through a huge expanse of space with incredible speed. Time became irrelevant as the impulse layers came on-line, adding their propulsion to each previous push. Each engine gave of it’s all, designed to work once only, each igniting the next in an ever increasing spiral of power. The capsule began to glow with heat as it tore up vast distances in emi—parsecs. With the divine knowledge of the Seers’s predictions imbued into the pod’s guidance system, the many millitons to earth’s solar system were soon eaten up. As the engines burned themselves out, the craft slowed due to the actions of the many tiny particles in space, causing friction and heating of the pod’s outer surface. With all propulsion power finally used up, the tiny vessel began to slow and drift as it fell under the gravitational pull of Mars.

Scene 200:

Professor Hagen had been tracking the unusual comet’s approach for some time. It fascinated him, as it’s trajectory was unlike any celestial object he had hitherto observed. Even sitting in their domicile room, he scarcely registered poor Annalee’s demands, as she desperately tried to encourage Subaru to take more interest in his own Son, Shiro. But Hagen’s mind was firmly fixed on the stars. As a consequence, arguments between him and Annalee began to worsen.

“There is more to life than work!” she had desperately shouted one time.

“I-I am sorry my dear, I will make more effort for you”, he retorted.

“You always say that Subaru, do you not love Shiro?”

“Of-of course I do my dear, my mind is just occupied right now”, he stammered.

“I wish I could believe you Subaru”, sighed Annalee.

Subaro’s contactor signalled to him again, “I, er I have to go”, he stated awkwardly.

She watched him leave, and heard Shiro’s cries once more. Turning she walked slowly and deliberately to Shiro’s cot. She scooped up her beloved son, held him and at once he began to giggle and chuckle away. Why does Subaru have no time for him?, She wondered. He is no trouble at all. She accessed a long-range communicator port, with Shiro sitting giggling on her lap. Selecting earth, she wiped away a tear as she booked two one-way tickets. She could not bear to expose Shiro to any further stresses, and vowed she would bring the child up in a better environment, back on earth. Subaru could always visit them...

Scene 201:

Hagen rushed to the main Mars institute observation centre. His colleagues greeted him with excitement and trepidation. The comet Subaru had been tracking had collided with the surface of Mars!

“We must go take a look!” His excitement drowning out any fears he may have had.

“We must take some readings of the area first Subaru”, said Attayama, his fellow science officer.

“I will do that on the way, I am not scared” snapped Hagen. Making preparations to activate a Mars scout vehicle. “I am sure we will find something quite unusual, this projectile is like no other I have ever seen!”

Rushing his bio-suit on, Attayama could see that Hagen was not going to be stopped, so he decided to accompany him, for safety’s sake.

EP19:

Scene 202:

Within his huge fortress planet, the Imperial Master watched as events seem to thwart his best Commander's efforts at every turn. Her latest report had been typical, it was almost as though proceedings were following a pre-ordained path. He tried to snap his thoughts away from such nonsense, but he too remembered the details of the prophecies he had so recklessly plundered. He decided his own insurance policy was needed. He feared the power of the F-01, and knew it must be captured and crushed before it had gained in strength to try to overthrow him. He needed a vessel in which to contain its great powers, and to which he could add his own to create the ultimate force for evil and oppression and cement his rule over the entire galaxy. He needed the essence of the Ancient Thalian to once again rise up and provide him with an heir. However, such an act should not impinge on his own powers of rule, therefore such a being should remain inert until the time came for him to unite the very elemental powers and ascend to unimpeachable heights. With the power of the F-01, and his own energies contained within a new body, there would be no stopping the total domination of the Imperial Alliance.

Scene 203:

Shutting off his many links to his minions, he dived within his own psyche, and re-connected with his ancient home planet. The Thalian elemental rock from whence he had first emerged. He was soon walking on its charged surface, the scars of the many battles he had fought with the elders still evident in places. He picked up a charred piece of meteorite, and a piece of the unique Thalian planet's own indigenous alluvium, and using his own divine strength, he compressed and imbued the fragments together, breaking off a single piece of his own metal torso, beams came forth from his eyes as he stood on the remains of the altar that had seen his birth, drawing forth energy from deep within the planet's core. He felt a stirring inside the mass he held between his hands. Then, it was done, now the forces of time needed to play their part, and he threw the congealed mass of fledgling evil up, up away from the surface of the Thalian's globe, to orbit the planet, and slowly grow in power and life-force as he himself had done. The shard of his own anatomy would one day be the communicator that would awaken the slumbering beast.

Scene 204:

On Mars, Professor Hagen was about to make an amazing discovery. The scout vehicle had reached the site of the impact with the planet's surface. Strangely Hagen could see very little damage, no real crater, no scoring, not even much dust. His visual display showed something much more incredible up ahead. Half-buried in the Martian surface, was a white craft. It was small, but certainly alien as Hagen knew of no such craft on any Star Fleet mission. Attayama urged caution, but Subaru felt no fear.

"It is OK, I just know it" He told the confused science officer. Before Attayama could stop him, Subaru was outside the relative safety of the vehicle, and was inspecting the crashed vessel.

Scene 205:

He could not believe his eyes, inside was a baby, a beautiful baby! As he approached the pod, the outer canopy opened and revealed a small inner transparent enclosed bed. The tiny infant looked out at Subaru through shiny, warm and loving eyes. Subaru made to pick up the cot and suddenly the Kirree awakened and lurched up at Subaru. But before he could move, the beast had collapsed, exhausted due to its long journey. Subaru had made an incredible discovery indeed. He somehow knew the child was special, humanoid yet alien as well, with an incredible aura of peace around it. He had to tell General Kyle about this, he would know what to do.

Scene 206:

Later back at the Mars Institute, Professor Hagen was filling in General Kyle personally via a scrambled vid-link.

"...So General, as well as the alien baby girl with her special pendant, and the yeti-like creature that may be her guardian, there was also an alien data chip of some sort. I am attempting to dissimilate its contents".

"Good work Hagen, this entire episode must be kept under wraps until you are able to discover more about these strange finds".

"Yes General, you can count on me sir!"

"Oh, Hagen, I heard about your split between Annalee and that you no longer see your son, as they are back on earth".

"Yes General, it was regrettable, I was immature..."

"I am sorry Hagen, but it seems that fate has given you another child to care for. I trust you will be a better guardian to this girl?"

"Of course General, I have already named her Lamia".

"Lamia? Excellent, please keep me informed of all developments."

"Certainly General".

Scene 207:

And so Professor Hagen became a parent for the second time, only this time in secret. The creature he also rescued showed much aptitude in caring for the child, who grew in beauty of both body and mind. He spent as much time as he could with Lamia, but the contents of the data disc gradually began to take over his life. Contained within them were many amazing plans, schematics and theories, and Hagen's brilliant mind leapt upon them with vigour. It was almost as though they had been written for him. As time passed he began to formulate a super-weapon, which he designated "Project X". The ever loving Lamia was never wanting, only loving him, but he knew he could not devote the time to her he needed. There was another thought in his mind, and when Subaru became engrossed in something, he could not let it go until he had followed it through. He had become obsessed with the origins of this beautiful child that had come into his life. He had to know more. Contained within the many plans, was a brief outline of a sleek and fast-looking space ship. Hagen pondered as to its inclusion on the disc. The design embodied some form of transponder or signal, that the ship would send out as it navigated the stars. Hagen felt sure it was some clue as to Lamia's identity.

Scene 208:

On a routine report to General Kyle, Subaru mentioned that Project X was now nearing the time when it needed extra resources and personnel in order to take the project to the next stage, Prototype!

"Hagen, I have just the man, you will like him, his name is Dr. Benn Robinson".

Subaro had heard of the esteemed Dr. Benn, an eccentric pipe-smoking character, who possessed one of the finest research minds in Star Fleet. "He would be ideal to join the X-project sir", stated Subaru.

"Excellent, I'll contact him and set up a meeting".

Subaro knew that it was now or never for him to make his bid to find the origin of Lamia. He knew that Dr. Benn would be the right person to take the X-project forward, and he hoped that he would also be able to give Lamia the time and tuition she deserved.

Scene 209:

Later in the lab, as the last few of the research institute staff left for rest, Subaru bided his time and snuck into his private development workshops. General Kyle had given him a blank cheque and carte blanche to do as he wished with impunity, and Subaru had been busy. He had built that prototype craft and gathered his supplies together. He knew that Dr. Benn would be arriving on Mars in a day or so. Perfect.

He climbed aboard and powered up the small crafts' impulse engines. Opening the main partition between his lab and the outer launch bay through his craft's controls, he energised the vertical lift boosters. The sleek craft rose up off the ground, and nosed out into the main launch bay. Activating the main engines, Subaru guided the craft out into the Martian sky, and then engaging impulse drive, he left Mars far behind.

Scene 210:

In the Mars institute control centre, the craft's launch did not go unnoticed, but before any pursuit ship could be readied, Hagen's ship had attained hyperspeed and had vanished from the radar screens.

Scene 211:

In a far distant part of space, the Imperial battle cruiser began its long search for the feint trail of Lamia's escape capsule. Makara was on the warpath, shouting commands at her unfortunate Captain.

"Orion, can we not make any faster speed?"

"N-no Commander, the engines are at maximum output".

"Well perhaps you should direct your attentions to raising the output? Are you not aware of what will happen to you if we fail this mission?"

B-by your divine guidance" came his wilting reply.

Scene 212:

In her prison of blackness, Mary drifted helplessly. Unable to attain any control over her own environment, yet her mind was also enjoying being free of the terrible dark forces which had plagued her for so long. Thoughts span round in her disembodied mind, was she now lost forever, banished from contact with another soul? She had no sense of time any longer, so when she heard a voice, she could not decide if minutes or decades had passed.

"Mary...Mary" it said.

Cautious at first, she concentrated her mind on the voice and it grew stronger.

"Mary, I have come back for you".

It was with much relief that she realised the voice was not Makara's. But it was familiar...

"Mary, it is me, The Captain".

"Captain, you have returned!", She exclaimed joyfully.

"I have missed you my love".

"So have I", said Mary. "But I have failed you, the darkness has won, I have lost".

"No Mary, you have not lost. It was I who had lost my way, but I am here again. And now you must come with me".

"B-but, what if she returns..."

"Do not fret, if your nemesis appears, you must show only one emotion, Love!"

"Show her love?, But how?"

"Follow my lead, it is the only way you will be free".

Mary was gradually aware of a change in the blackness, a tiny pinprick began to get lighter. She knew this was her chance to escape. She concentrated on the glow, red at first, then orange, yellow and finally a bright white light appeared. She was suddenly conscious of another being materialising, it was the dashing Captain, her Captain. He was standing by the portal of light, smiling. Then suddenly, a familiar voice made itself heard:

"So Corliss, you have returned! Well it is too late! You shouldn't have run away before and deserted your friend. Now she is mine!"

"I was weak, I acknowledge that, but I am now stronger than you could possibly imagine Makara" Corliss calmly spoke.

With that, the defiant image of Makara appeared, sword raised. She smiled an evil grin and positioned herself between Mary and the Captain. Mary was suddenly aware of her own body again, this time with no cyborg implants anywhere. She strode up to Makara.

"I am no longer afraid, you cannot kill me".

"I already have my dear, where do you think you are now?" Makara retorted.

Mary concentrated on the Captains' words of love and walked ever closer to her red-haired demon.

Makara raised her sword: "I warn you, stay back!" she spat at Mary.

Mary suddenly understood what she had been missing all along. A great weight lifted from within her and she smiled at Makara: "I pity you, but... I love you" she said. "Maybe one day you will be able to love me too".

Makara's red eye winced at the words, and she brought her sword down on Mary, but it just passed right through her.

"NO!" she screamed, "You are mine!"

Realising her strength, Mary passed straight through her nemesis, and turned to look back. Makara stood there, aghast, confused, unable to move. Mary turned and took the hand of the Captain. They seemed to fly, and entwine together and were at one with the greater force of good that the Alliance so feared.

"I don't need you anyway, I have won!" Screamed Makara after them.

Scene 213:

Then she was back on the bridge of her battle cruiser. Her symbiont returned control to her and she gazed out at the minions under her control. "They can't stop me now" she sneered to herself.

"Orion, status report!" She snapped, as a single tiny tear ran down from her brooding red eye.

And the huge Kathaar class cruiser continued its search for the F-01.

Epilogue:

A young girl runs over to her mentor and protector. She looks up at him with glowing bright blue eyes and hugs him round his legs. He puts his pipe to one side and picks her up.

“Lets have a story Lamia” the smiling bearded man says, before sitting them both down on a soft armchair.

“Once, in a land far from here....”

Elsewhere...

A group of young cadets excitedly await the start of their most eagerly anticipated lesson. Advanced combat techniques. Their chatter soon hushed as their new instructor appeared in front of his class. An adventurous, stylish character, his EDF cap perched jauntily on top of thick flowing locks of blonde hair. His eyes hidden behind dark shades, he is a character that immediately put awe into the assembled cadets.

As he begins to speak, a young cadet in particular is transfixed by this charismatic teacher.

Captain Carter’s first question comes early on in the lecture, and he picks out a promising looking young lad to answer:

“You there, what’s your name son!”

“Cadet Hagen Sir!”