

THEY USE OUR CHILDREN

By

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I grew up on the stories. Our worlds were isolated, my people divided and we were cut off from the rest of the universe. Then, they arrived. Their great ship cut through poison and shadow and they promised us deliverance, so we named them teachers. Saviours. Gods. We could not have been more wrong.

Space travel is the foundation of all interstellar societies, yet it can still be mercilessly unforgiving. Piracy, bad navigational records or an improperly maintained hull might lead to a single ship's destruction, whilst an entire fleet can be crippled by Demonspace radiation, an Umibozu swarm or uncharted gravity wells; pulling ships to their oblivion like water down a sinkhole. The great powers of the Seventh Interstellar Age are those who have dedicated enormous resources to quelling these dangers and for the multitudes who live within their borders; travelling through tamed space, they should remember to count their blessings.

Not all are as fortunate.

At the northernmost edge of the Kronesian Arm; just beyond the furthest outposts of The Erenian Republic, four star systems form an infamously lethal region of space: The Pincer. Surrounded by an enormous nebula known appropriately as Venom, it burns through even the most advanced shielding at terrifying speeds. Attempting a warp space jump from within or without, the results are the same: Instant shield failure and warp-space collapse; breaking most ships apart and sending the few that survive into a minefield of local dangers. The Pincer is filled with subspace gravity wells, numerous antimatter anomalies and asteroid fields so large that even a single one would haunt the nightmares of the bravest starship captains for decades.

Records dating back as far as the Third Interstellar Age show that little changed in knowledge of this region for aeons, with long range scanners only able to confirm that five inhabited worlds existed within The Pincer. Researchers in the Seventh Age were able to confirm that interplanetary communication technology had been developed, yet all their attempts to reach out to the wider universe were unsuccessful. The Venom Nebula scrambles long-range communications, leaving messages a garbled wreck upon arrival with no hope of being salvaged.

With the region offering few incentives in material resources and some of the most extreme exploratory dangers seen for a hundred galaxies, The Pincer remained isolated even as civilisations rose and fell around them. Most assumed that if contact were ever to be established, it would have to be made by its inhabitants finding a way out from within. This would prove to be true. Yet when the first of them came, it was with words of sorrow, fear and hate, for this would not be their people's first contact with races beyond their homeworlds: That was made long ago.

Something had found their way in.

Sahrra.

In the ancient myths, it was how my people described our Holy Pantheon. They were the ones who brought life to the Five Worlds and it was they who formed the Poison Sky; the Venom Nebula, to protect us from dangers beyond. Our legends spoke of their

**departure from the physical world and to await their return, when they would banish the
Poison Sky and we would join the universe beyond on the Day of Emergence.**

**From what we know, the Sahrynian Faith had been in decline for many years but after
their arrival, everything changed. They claimed to be our gods, returned to us at last and
their leader spoke as if she were the greatest of them. Though nothing like us, it did not
cause fear, for the Sahrre were said to be shapeshifters who appeared to us in forms our
minds could accept. Now, across the Five Worlds, my people heard her in our minds as one
and all wept with shared joy.**

**For hundreds of generations, we had struggled to survive. The Poison Sky blankets our
worlds and even the places where we endure are filled with hardships. Even now, I cannot
blame my ancestors for their earliest actions. For the first time in aeons, they had hope for
a better future and it blinded them. Everyone believed it was the dawn of a new age.**

To our eternal shame, they were right.

Though they claimed to be Gods, these ‘Sahrre’ were nothing of the sort. Once known to the wider universe as Kirisyn, their appearance is defined by pale white skin, stretched thin across a ten feet long skeleton; arrowlike in shape. They have no legs, twelve arms with twenty fingered hands and nine eyes of pulsing brown. Each Kirisyn has powerful telepathic abilities, capable of

communicating with hundreds of their own kind or many thousands from humanoid races simultaneously. They can also manipulate their molecular density, allowing them to levitate within three weeks of their birth, at which point they will continue to do so for their entire lives; even while sleeping, unless extremely injured.

The Kirisyn were a prosperous race during the Sixth and early Seventh Interstellar Ages. Though their homeworld of Malkinnos was not resource rich, they were talented engineers and developed a new type of starship deflector shielding. Whilst no more effective than standard in military engagements, their unique composition proved revolutionary in combating deep space phenomena and; for a time, allowed their race to thrive as some of the universe's greatest explorers.

Unfortunately, the Kirisyn descended into civil war during the Third Crisis of the Seventh Age and the collapse of the Quay'Lun Empire. Seven factions fought for control of Malkinnos and tens of thousands were slaughtered in engagements that tore open fault lines across nine continents. Each of these battles centred around a dozen Vylen Class Starships, great twin-bridge vessels that were once the backbone of the Kirisyn's exploratory fleets. After three years of brutal fighting, Malkinnos was destroyed when the planetary core destabilised; taking the last five Vylen Starships down with it. Over the next two centuries, the remaining and isolated Kirisyn were wiped out in this era of intergalactic chaos; their race being declared as extinct by the Species Index in A7-23654 by the Galactic Calendar.

But they were wrong.

One ship had survived.

After their arrival, my people beseeched our Sahrria to remove the great barrier of the Poison Sky and; at first, it seemed as if they would honour this. We were granted technology that allowed us to build starships, capable of travelling safely between our planets. On the first anniversary of their arrival, representatives from the Five Worlds: Kenomi, Ohida, Saras, Terida & Viriwen, gathered to sign the Treaty of Nicurob. It was broadcast to tens of millions and generations have grown up watching that moment from our earliest days. There, we met as one; united for the first time. There, we worshipped before the Sahrria in person and it was there our leaders swore The Oath of Providence, pledging their eternal allegiance.

They had won the people's love far sooner.

After that meeting, they began to issue proclamations. The first of these declared that; in order to prepare us for the Day of Emergence, our societies must be restructured around new principles that would supersede any previous law or teachings within our holy texts.

They are known as...

The Sacred Tenets.

The Vylen Class Starship that survived the destruction of Malkinnos was known as The Bachquios or 'Shining Light'. Its engines, hull and life support systems all suffered major

damage in the escape from their homeworld and the survivors were forced to seal themselves in cryogenic stasis while the ship began repairs. This was a slow process, complicated by the need to remain undetected as the surrounding sectors of space filled with pirates and scavengers; come to pick clean the carcass of Malkinnos. Fortunately for those onboard, The Bachquios was equipped with their fleet's best cloaking technology, as well as automated molecular assemblies that would generate an army of nanobots to complete repairs; all whilst the crew remained in stasis.

However, it would not be a quick process.

It took the Bachquios, four-thousand, four-hundred and eighteen years to complete its repairs. By the time the crew was awoken from cryogenic stasis, the intergalactic order they once knew was gone. The star systems of the Kirisyn had all been occupied by powerful new races that would neither return nor share these lands with their former inhabitants. Soon, those aboard learned that their race was believed extinct by the rest of the universe and; in this new time, they were without allies or homes to return to.

Then, they learned how dire the situation truly was.

During their long slumber, the Bachquios had; on three separate occasions, been forced to shutdown life support to dozens of the cryopods, in order to avoid a cascade failure that would have either exposed the ship or caused its destruction. Both of these were outcomes the quantummatrix had been ordered to avoid at all costs and in order to do so, thirty-two percent of the ship's inhabitants had been sacrificed. While a devastating personal tragedy for the crew, this was calculated to be a favourable outcome in contrast to the ship's destruction.

Acceptable losses.

However, the quantummatrix had not been programmed to ensure the survival of their species and therefore, it operated under the conventional social parameters enforced by its designers. What this meant was; like many other starships, the safety of the women and children was considered paramount. Thirty-two percent of the crew was an acceptable loss in extreme circumstances and from that one calculation, every single male aboard the Bachquios was allowed to die. The Kirisyn had been preserved, yet now, they had no future.

Their race was doomed.