

*One truth is clear. 'Whatever is, is right.'*

Alexander Pope

Born on the flying city of Newton, Pirian Horncastle has always felt the weight of the Erth pulling him towards his destiny. He and his parents are among the very few inhabitants who remain free of the 'Dosage' - a controlling drug that turns most of the population into psychopaths.

When Pirian's father, Jeradon Horncastle, is falsely accused for the murder of their Emperor, both are outcast into the raging seas below. Washed ashore, they are brought to the attention of the Rojin, a spiritual people who Jeradon had once slaughtered. But in a twist of prophecy, their enemy and his son hold the fate of the Rojin people and the very soul of their immortal leader in the palm of their hands.

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# The Enemy's Son

JAMES JOHNSON

- N W T I T T E R T H C H R O N I C L E S ∞ J O R J I N W

BOOK I

The  
Enemy's  
Son





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BOOK I

THE ENEMY'S SON: EARTH CHRONICLES BOOK I

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Husband, Father, Grandfather



*All Nature is but art, unknown to thee  
All chance, direction, that thou canst not see;  
All discord, harmony not understood;  
All partial evil, universal good:  
And, spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,  
One truth is clear, 'Whatever is, is right.'*

Alexander Pope: *Essay on Man*, Epistle I





## One

This was no game, other than a sick and twisted one.

He had been awoken by the distant chaos - a boy, frightened and alone, stumbling through the dense undergrowth. His tear stained eyes could barely make out what was in front of him, as the smoke slowly engulfed the forest.

A single word echoed in the distance:

“Horncastle!”

Hearing his name, Pirian Horncastle paused briefly, coughing and spluttering as he attempted to catch his breath. Gripped by fear, all he could think about was the raging inferno and the icy hatred in the eyes of those hunting him. Wiping his eyes, he ran on, his hammering heart crying out for more oxygen.

Ancient timbers were devoured by the blazing heat, a faint orange glow lighting the night sky as trees groaned and cracked in the distance. Ahead of the fire his pursuers had started, the deathly grey smoke continued to seep through the once verdant foliage, strangling and suffocating all in its path.

Every creature in the forest surged forward. Wild-eyed hares pelted through the smouldering bracken, mice scurried between scorched roots, and glistening reptiles crawled and slithered over the lifeless bodies of those too slow to outrun the encroaching hell.

“There’s no one here to save you now...not even your own pathetic father!” a voice called.

There was a painful truth to the harsh tone, driving a knife

into Pirian's heart as much as the dying air. This was no longer a place for an eleven year old; even though he had been raised in Greenhouse One, the size of the habitat had now outgrown him; he'd never locate his father without a comlink...if he was here at all.

*For once, you should have listened to your parents and never have come back here,* he thought to himself in frustration.

Laughter and hollering interrupted his thoughts. They were closer now.

As Pirian and the rest of the creatures raced on, the trees became denser. He was buffeted by larger animals and branches whipped across his face, while small thickets grabbed at his ankles, causing Pirian to trip and fall. Immediately he covered his head, in fear of being trampled. Once the larger animals had passed, he waited and wiped his streaming eyes again. There was a temptation to hide from his pursuers amongst the undergrowth and keep below the smoke.

A targeting laser flashed onto a fallen tree trunk next to him. Pirian followed the red dot as it moved downwards, aligning on his chest.

They were toying with him.

Laughter followed once again as another voice called out, "We'll promise to make it quick and painless. The same way we've put the rest of the Erth scum out of their misery."

The dot disappeared and Pirian scabbled forward.

He didn't move far.

It was the smell of the dead kyber that pulled him to his feet, more so than its bloody remains. Its mouth hung open, revealing broken, canine teeth; clawed legs twisted under the weight of its body, caked in blood. Clutching his mouth, Pirian ran on; lungs aching and burning, stomach churning, his head pounding.

The kyber wasn't the first slaughtered animal he had come across; there were many littered across the valley. Those which

were still alive continued to run with him - they knew as well as he did what 'quick and painless' meant.

*Cornelius!* Pirian prayed his pursuers hadn't reached his friend. His only friend; one who listened and shared the very same pain he was feeling right now as the fire slowly engulfed the last Greenhouse.

"Where are you going?" a voice shouted.

The voices drew ever closer as he finally broke ahead of the smoke.

Pirian was no runner at the best of times. His body was weak and with no Guild training, he was in poor condition. His legs burned with fatigue as his pace slowed rapidly. Coming up to a steep ravine, his foot caught a vine. There was no floor to catch him this time and he tumbled downwards, crashing through tree canopies as he cartwheeled over and over.

*No rocks, please no rocks,* he thought.

As he fell, more vines coiled round his body slowing his descent. Finally he rolled out into a clearing. Many of the animals that followed had reached the bottom safely, jumping over him as he lay on the floor in a tangled heap.

Pirian lifted back his hood and pulled away the knotted vines. He then wiped his eyes once again, along with his scratched and grubby face, a mixture of blood, sweat and mud smearing his overcoat sleeve.

Panting, he attempted to catch his breath.

Fresh air.

The smoke hadn't reached the clearing. It continued to rise high above the canopy's orange glow, but it was only a matter of time before the fire engulfed everything in its path. A roaring sound filled his ears as the heat steadily increased.

A waterfall tumbled down the left side of the ravine, feeding a small lake. The river was the main source of life within the habitat. It hadn't been that long since all three of his father's

Greenhouses were as vibrant as this. The lake was one of many scattered throughout its habitat, settling on the outer rim. The cycle washed away the autumn leaves that clung to the banks. It had become a natural ecosystem supplying water to the rain system, helping to prevent any potential fire. But something had been tampered with.

Pirian could make out the breaking of dawn, the approaching fire only emphasising the warm glow.

Butterflies and hummingbirds scattered as most of the animals dived into the water, attempting to reach the opposite side of the lake as quickly as possible.

His pursuers howled.

They were closer than ever and he could barely move.

He had felt the Greenhouse's pain the moment the fire had begun. As its envirocontrol had malfunctioned, its power over him had grown weaker. The nausea spread, pulling at his insides, his guts twisting, before he finally vomited. His altitude sickness had intensified as an unseen force pulled his body downwards.

Wiping his mouth, he dumped his backpack and opened it. Removing a fashioned stick that resembled a wooden sword, he jabbed it into the ground and fought against the gravity. Finally pulling himself up, he clutched his arm and made his way slowly to the edge of the lake. Amongst the commotion he rolled up his sleeve, revealing a small mark that was beginning to change shape.

Although Pirian wasn't a strong swimmer, he was still tempted to jump in. Instead, he simply scooped up water with his free hand, soothed his raw throat and splashed the irritated mark.

The undergrowth parted nearby, and a slow moving animal, the size of a large serving tray, made its way towards him. Before the creature stopped in front of him, a long neck extended from its shell.

Gradually, the creature edged towards an apple that had fallen from his backpack.

Pirian took one last gulp of water and pulled his marked arm from the lake.

“This...isn’t the time to eat, Cornelius.”

Filled with deep grooves and scratches, a small rock was embedded in the creature’s shell; a mark of the harsh world in which it lived. The act of cruel pleasure had happened when the creature was younger; the shell now having grown around the rock. Munching the apple, the tortoise sniffed the air, the creature’s slow pace at odds with Pirian’s frantic worry about his situation.

Cornelius didn’t keep the food down for long. The fact that he shared Pirian’s sickness only bound them further together. The slow, harmless animal was his only friend. Neither of them relied on the Dosage, and had never felt the need to harm and destroy lives and the work of others. Pirian understood what feelings were, along with every other animal in the habitat.

The smoke hung high above. Pirian flinched as he heard another firebomb explode nearby. There was a sound of trampled undergrowth as three silhouettes appeared through the billowing cloud of smoke.

Flames furred upwards with an intense ferocity, eating everything in their path. Pirian’s eyes stayed locked on the figures walking out of the fire.

“Ahhh, there you are,” said the leader of the group, masked and hooded. “Wallowing in the dirt. Anyone would think you were Erth born.”

It was Viktor Jakahn. Although Pirian couldn’t make out his features underneath the hood and gas mask, his tormentor’s eyes were all too clear in his mind; the image of the brutish face and sadistic grin had been beaten into him many times before. Seven years older than Pirian, Viktor took full advantage as he towered

over him.

Viktor's accomplices were of the same build. Newtonians were bred to physical perfection; the slightest defect eradicated. Even A-class females were built for fighting - Loran in particular easily mistaken for any male counterpart. All that distinguished Neel was the gel cast attached to his broken arm.

As they surrounded him, Pirian held out his wooden sword. He steadied himself as best he could, while the fire closed in.

Viktor swaggered up to him, pushing the sword aside with the back of his left hand. He followed through with the back of his right, striking Pirian square across the face and knocking him to the ground.

Shaking his head, Pirian wiped the blood from his nose.

Standing above him, Viktor tapped his temple, his gas mask flipping down to his chest plate.

An all too familiar glow of amber lit his eyes. Zetameen; Newton's precious Dosage, a controlling drug that had brainwashed society for centuries; turning most into weak, single minded individuals who only knew how to follow the orders of the Hierarchy, Newton's government. The Dosage helped most people forget their true emotions; but for a few it enhanced their psychopathic nature.

Pirian noticed its effects were also apparent in their posture. They had all clearly taken far more of the Dosage than necessary; Loran and Neel's shoulders were relaxed, their arms swinging as they lumbered forwards. Pirian almost felt optimistic that their Dosage-induced state may have relaxed them too much to cause any further harm.

But Viktor was in full control as he loomed in, cocking his head. "Why on Erth do you still come here?"

"To try and get away from people like you," snapped Pirian. He could hear the click and whir of Viktor's retinal implant. The sadistic piece of work was recording the whole ordeal, more than

likely to sell as further entertainment.

“Is that right?” replied Viktor, picking up Pirian’s backpack and pulling out a book. “You know it’s a crime to own one of these,” he sneered, and threw it at his accomplices.

“Hardly matters now,” replied Pirian.

“I guess not. But we can always have you flogged instead.” Viktor looked over his victim’s shoulder at the tortoise. Distracted by the burning smell and the intensity of the surrounding heat, Pirian was still concerned for Cornelius’ safety.

He held up his wooden sword once again as Viktor stared back. Snatching the piece of wood from Pirian’s grasp, he continued to taunt him.

“You know, we could find a much sharper sword to play with,” he said as he snapped the wooden replica over his knee, throwing it into the hungry flames. Looking back at Pirian, he pushed him further to the ground with his foot, clicking his fingers and gesturing towards the tortoise.

Loran and Neel immediately set about stamping on the animal’s shell.

“Knock, knock!” Loran taunted.

Viktor placed more pressure on a struggling Pirian. “Stop it!” he shouted, almost suffocating under Viktor’s weight.

“Keep your mouth shut, Horncastle,” snapped Viktor.

“Dad...” he tried to catch his breath, “Dad will have you all strung up if you harm him.”

“I’m sure he would...” sneered Viktor, “But your daddy’s not here is he?”

“He’s...he’s here. Just...”

Viktor smiled smugly. “If he was here, there is no way we’d have broken in so easily and caused our little fire.”

“No. He...” Pirian began to reply, before thinking of his father’s whereabouts.

Viktor grinned, “I’d have thought the Horncastles would



have had a more worthy pet than a decrepit looking tortoise. What good is it?" he paused. "What good is any animal?"

"What good are you?" shouted Pirian, goaded beyond endurance.

Removing his foot, Viktor grabbed Pirian by the scruff of the neck and lifted him from the ground, "You really are asking for trouble."

Hanging limply from Viktor's arm, Pirian wiped his bleeding nose once again. "I've never needed to ask for it."

Viktor grinned with satisfaction, buzzing with zetameen.

"What are you going to do to him?" asked Neel.

Viktor released his grip slightly and lowered Pirian, "Nothing..."

"Nothing?" repeated Loran.

He sneered over at her and Neel then turned and looked at the tortoise. "But seeing if a tortoise can fly...that might be fun."

The fire raged. Viktor grabbed his victim once again, proceeding to drag him around the lake. Loran and Neel followed carrying Cornelius.

Pirian could see the frantic animals in the distance. Viktor removed his plasma gun, the laser sighting training in on a target. The gun recoiled and in the distance another victim fell.

At first it looked as though most of the animals were hiding in the surrounding undergrowth as the flames crept forward. Then, as Pirian was dragged closer, he could make out a distortion, as though his surroundings were bending in the light of the flames.

A further distortion quickly followed, then a flickering.

It was the Greenhouse's hologram. Projected onto the outer walls, it helped maintain a more natural environment. Usually the technology was impenetrable, but the fire had affected the electrical systems, which was the main reason the water supply hadn't been triggered to kill the fire.

As Pirian and Cornelius were dragged through the projection,

what appeared to be a high cliff face and surrounding trees continued to flicker. As it vanished, the hologram finally revealed a cold geodesic structure of steel and glass walls.

Viktor proceeded to smash a nearby console fastened to the wall, then pulled several safety levers, all the while his free arm still wrapped around Pirian's neck. A large, heavy door slowly rose and cold air began to rush into the habitat. Several animals pushed their way through. The opening door slowly revealed a maintenance veranda circling the entire structure, where an angled, transparent barrier with inset steps either side led up to a rail system.

Viktor threw Pirian to the ground.

Dawn's light had taken hold. Transfixed by the expanse of open sky and surrounding clouds, Pirian was reminded further of how high up they were. As the gravity pulled at his guts, he knew all too well how dangerous it was to be on the very outer limits of a flying city.

## I

The last thing he remembered was an intense light.

His mind was so scattered he couldn't even remember the word 'death', let alone the meaning of the brightness before him.

Then it vanished into shadow. Darkness was becoming all too familiar, until he felt the heat of the fire.

He could see the light and the dark, or maybe he couldn't see at all?

*Pain.*

Aware of this, he finally opened his eyes. The cruel sensation was coming from the palms of his hands. They felt as though they had been burnt somehow.

*Black.*

## Two

Defying every rule of gravity, Newton drew the clouds around its majestic structure, its silent pride protected by the elements. At the centre of the flying city stood the silver and bronze towers of its capital, Ivar, dominating every other structure in sight and crowning the Erth below. It was shaped in a circle, and surrounded by three more. These cities, Alva, Beda and Gam, broke away from the central structure, a sign of gradual expansion - for the city was now more like a small country. The once brightly coloured foliage that had sought sunlight now burned brightly within the remaining Greenhouse, resembling an open wound across the gleaming architecture of Newton.

The wind howled and although the fresh air filled Pirian's lungs, the altitude sickness continued to overwhelm him. "Gi... give me back the tortoise," he pleaded, raising his hand to his mouth as he gagged once more.

Viktor's eyes narrowed, savouring the moment. "I don't think so Horncastle, it'll spoil the fun."

Pirian watched in horror as Loran and Neel handed Viktor the tortoise, before climbing the steps of the barrier.

Running the entire circumference of the Greenhouse exterior, the maintenance veranda was strictly out of bounds. Anyone who strayed outside of the maintenance car without a safety harness risked being torn away by the strong winds. Yet Viktor seemed invincible as he stood confidently above everyone.

Becoming more distraught by the second, Pirian shouted out

once again, “Give me back Cornelius... please!”

“Give me back Cornelius, give me back Cornelius.’ What are you going to do about it?” Viktor mocked, balancing precariously along the barrier as Loran and Neel laughed. “I think you’re going to have to climb up here and get him off me. If you dare.”

Pirian’s fear of heights went hand in hand with the altitude sickness; a cruel punishment for being born on a flying city. There was very little he could do about it; the cackles of Loran and Neel taunting him further.

“Throw it over, Viktor, go on!” shouted Loran.

“Yeah, do it!” followed Neel.

“You...d...dare, Viktor!” stuttered Pirian.

“D...d...duh, duh, duh,” Viktor taunted. “I told you, come and get him!”

Pirian knew deep down it was the only chance he had of retrieving Cornelius. If it meant confronting his fear of heights, then so be it. The cackling laughter of Loran and Neel ceased as soon as he staggered over to the barrier and began to climb the steps. Not for a moment did he take his eyes off Viktor.

Once he had finally managed to reach the top, there was nothing to hold onto other than the tracks of the rail system running along the surface of the barrier. The tracks were no wider than the maintenance cars themselves, with very little width to crawl along.

He didn’t stand immediately. Frozen, he had caught a glimpse of the nothingness below. The clouds were an endless white landscape of cotton wool, blocking out any hint of land. He could make out what looked like more Newtonian cruisers approaching the city, and the wind battered at his body as he held on for dear life. The twirling white and blue was both magnificent and horrific, as everything around him began to spin and spiral out of control.

His stomach rose to the back of his throat, his altitude sickness taking hold once again. Retching, he heard the blood pumping in his head, a deafening thud as he looked up at Viktor. Pirian couldn't hear a word he was saying, nor could he hear Lorán and Neel laughing anymore.

Petrified, he gripped the freezing metal tracks. Turning his head away from view, the thumping in his head began to calm as the laughter and jeering of his tormentors slowly rose.

"Get up, Horncastle!" shouted Viktor. "You snivelling little rat! If you want the tortoise to live, get up!"

Closing his eyes, he struggled to calm his breathing. His whole body shook as he dragged himself up onto his knees. Eventually, he managed to stand upright, his legs trembling. Finally, he opened his eyes again, glaring at Viktor. The sadist held Cornelius casually under one arm as though he weighed nothing, while his tormentor swayed in slow motion.

"That's it. Not that hard when you put your mind to it. Even a wimp like you can do it."

"L...le...let him...go," begged Pirian reaching out his arms, his own voice slowing in his head.

"Oooh, I'm not sure," Viktor replied as he spun the tortoise around between both hands, holding him out in front of Pirian.

Pirian looked at Cornelius' shell, but the animal was barely visible inside. There was no telling if it had already died, until gradually its head began to poke out, eyes slowly opening.

"P...put him down."

"I think you should make more of an effort and come and get him off me."

Pirian tried to place a foot forward. It might as well have been glued to the barrier. He was rigid, frozen from fear as well as the cold winds.

"L...I ca...can't," he looked at the helpless creature still held out in front of him. It blinked. He almost thought there was a

smile from the tortoise as Viktor held him over the barrier.

“That’s too bad, Horncastle,” he said, letting go.

“No!” wailed Pirian, slumping forward to his knees, as he watched Cornelius fall from view. Losing his balance, he almost fell himself, gripping the barrier with one hand as he reached out with the other. The cold metal stung his chest, his arm stretched over the barrier in a hopeless effort to catch his friend. As everything began to spin once again, he closed his eyes. Shaking, he gripped the barrier harder than ever. Then he felt himself being lifted up, his throat being squeezed as Viktor lifted him clear off the ground. Keeping his eyes closed, he prayed for Viktor to end it now. There was no strength left in him, as Viktor threw him down the sloping barrier.

Sliding downwards, Pirian hit the veranda floor, rolling over onto his back. He was too numb with cold to feel any more pain.

Jumping down from the barrier, Viktor landed with a slam in front of him. He nodded to his accomplices, and they lifted him off the ground, as Viktor rammed his fist into Pirian’s stomach.

He doubled over, the wind momentarily knocked out of him. Managing to regain his breath, he looked up.

Viktor drew his plasma gun and placed it against Pirian’s head.

The plasma cells charged.

Pirian quivered uncontrollably as a warm, wet sensation filled his leggings.

“POW!” taunted Viktor as Loran and Neel howled with laughter.

Then the barrier began to shake.

Distracted, Viktor frowned and lowered his head slightly, concentrating on the approaching sound.

“The maintenance car?” said Loran.

Viktor looked back at Pirian and grabbed his face. “Looks

like Daddy's finally arrived. Better late than never, hey?"

Pirian clenched his teeth. He let out an uncontrollable breath, and his bottom lip trembled.

Viktor shoved Pirian's head away as Loran and Neel dropped him to the floor. Then, Viktor made his way over to a mechanism known as a jettison lever - a contingency programmed into most structures on Newton, in case they caught fire or systems failed. With no care for the state of the world below, all structures jettisoned were condemned to destruction - becoming no more than another dangerous obstacle.

Loran and Neel helped to shift the weight of the lever. As they brought it down with a rusty clang, the Greenhouse lurched.

On the huge jettison arm, the whole habitat slowly began to move away from Newton.

There was nowhere for Pirian to go. Even if he had the strength, or even the guts to brave the fire raging inside the Greenhouse, the door was now firmly shut. He couldn't even stand, and prayed for the imminent arrival of his father.

He watched as Loran and Neel climbed the barrier. Viktor approached one final time. "You want to see Erth so much, so be it. You can both go down with your precious Greenhouse." He paused savouring the moment. "I always said this would be the death of your father. Now the great Jeradon Horncastle can watch his son die with him."

Quickly pulling up his hood, Viktor's mask snapped back up into place. Then he ran up the barrier, jumping from view. Loran and Neel followed and within seconds they soared upwards, wings extended from their Guild training suits.

Caked blood surrounded Pirian's nose and mouth, his tears having almost frozen his eyelids shut. As he hugged himself for warmth, his nausea continued to pull at his guts. He shivered from the cold and sickness, as he noticed a few animals nervously scamper past.



Pausing for a moment, he dragged himself to the door. Looking through, he could see the Greenhouse ablaze.

He slumped down, waiting for the inevitable.

Jeradon Horncastle had no time to wait for the maintenance car to stop. Pirian watched as his father jumped from the doors directly onto the veranda.

“Pirian!...My boy...”

Pirian trembled, placing his hand to his mouth in an attempt to stop himself from being sick once again.

“I have to get you onboard. Before the Greenhouse is jettisoned.”

In no time at all Pirian was lifted and carried back up to the car.

“H...he, he k...killed him, Dad. He...he threw him away like he was nothing.”

“Killed who?” asked his father as he threw the accelerator forward.

Pirian couldn’t bear to look him in the eyes. “Cornelius. Viktor...th...threw him over the side. Like he was...was a piece of rubbish.”

“You’re safe. For the time being that’s all that matters.” Jeradon was obviously controlling his frustration. “You fell asleep again, didn’t you? Your mother and I, we told you not to come here. We kept telling you.”

“I...I’m sorry,” replied Pirian.

His father concentrated on what was ahead as an explosion surged outwards from the Greenhouse, throwing glass and metal across the veranda and track. “Good job I know where you hide at night. Just hold on, son.”

The car shook as it hit the debris. Luckily it remained fastened to the track.

Several more explosions erupted behind them, flames licking

at the car. In the distance, Pirian and his father could make out the fringes of the city, as the Greenhouse continued to move outwards, revealing its jettison arm more and more.

As the docking station approached, Jeradon attempted to slow the car down but it continued to accelerate.

Pirian could see the broken track ahead, tangled up with the station's platform.

His father grabbed hold of him, diving to the far end of the car to avoid the impact. As they approached the platform, the car was hurled upwards across the station, and carried on through.

Crashing through walls of glass and metal, Pirian and his father were thrown to the side as the car turned over, falling away from the Greenhouse station and down onto the jettison arm.

Cradled in his father's arms, Pirian had escaped any serious injury. Jeradon was on his feet before the car had even finished sliding to a halt. Lifting his son, he made his way out.

Pirian flinched as more explosions followed, debris falling all around them.

The colossus tracks that the Greenhouse moved along resembled gigantic metallic trenches, reaching back towards Newton. Pirian looked on helplessly as his father slung him over his shoulder and began to run.

Due to the arm moving the opposite way, they weren't getting any closer to the city, but they were still moving away from the Greenhouse. Pirian watched as the habitat came to a halt. He could see the titanic mechanisms underneath the habitat unlock. With an almighty roar the flaming Greenhouse fell away from the flying city.

Jeradon turned briefly, watching his life's work disappear. The Greenhouses had taken him over a decade to build and nurture. Erth's answers were lost; secrets of the Newtonian's enemy now nothing more than ash and twisted metal.

They could both feel the entire jettison arm tremble. Pirian

looked on as the claspers closed and rotated and his father turned and started to run again. Then the empty arm slowly began to move back.

Although the arm was now moving in the same direction as them, helping them cover more ground, Pirian realised that there was the danger of being crushed as the huge mechanism moved closer towards the city.

Noticing the service ladders hanging down at the end of the trench, Jeradon increased his pace.

As Jeradon raced up the ladder, he swapped Pirian to his other shoulder and began the ascent.

The huge mechanism continued to close in on them.

All Pirian could do was watch as the trench began to engulf them. He twisted his neck around, in an attempt to see how far up the ladder they were.

They reached the top and his father opened the hatch. As Jeradon raced further up the ladder, Pirian hung helplessly, watching the trench finally close beneath them.

Another hatch opened out into a maintenance room. Before long Pirian and his father had reached the glass doors of the inner docking station. It had once looked out across the valley of the Greenhouse, now it had been replaced by open sky.

Pirian was gently lowered to the ground. As his father steadied himself, he gripped his chest with exhaustion. Jeradon then turned and rested his head against the glass doors, his spirits crushed and his energy depleted.

“All your work, Dad.”

Pirian could see the tension in his father as Jeradon clenched his fists, then raised one in an effort to pound the glass door. He knew his father was controlling the anger as best he could, resting his fist against the glass instead. “Why couldn’t you listen?”

Pirian could sense his father’s disappointment, having

mistaken it for anger. Under the circumstances, he felt his father had every right to be angry. Tears streamed from Pirian's eyes. "I...I've s...said I was sorry, Dad. I was trying to find you. I didn't mean...I didn't mean to get into trouble. The Greenhouse, it just felt so safe there. My sickness..."

Turning his head, Jeradon looked at his only child.

Pirian watched as his father removed his dirty overcoat, placing it around his shivering son. "I know. You're safe. That's all that matters now."

Jeradon then continued to stare through the glass doors. The Greenhouse having vanished from view.

Pirian caught his own reflection. A dirty bruised face stared back. He watched his father slowly move his hands across his shaven head; his trousers were stained, along with his white, bloodied tunic.

Pirian felt as cold looking at the interior of Newton as he did out on the veranda.

The sound of marching footsteps approached. He noticed his father clench his fist once again as the footsteps grew louder.

Several Guildsmen appeared in perfect alignment, holding large rifles at their sides.

The Emperor's Guard wore chrome lightweight ceremonial armour with matching helmets to conceal most of their faces. There were five of them - four guards and a Commander who wore a regimental blue-grey uniform, instead of his own armour. A crimson red cape hung down from one shoulder, the Newtonian symbol holding it in place.

Pirian's stomach turned as the adrenaline rushed through his body. The pressure set him more and more on edge as the intimidating figures surrounded them. He could feel his heart rate increase once again, as he attempted to pull himself up from the floor. Giving up, he shuffled closer to his father for protection.

Something was wrong.

The guards and Commander came to a standstill.

Pirian noticed his father's blank expression as he turned to face them, addressing the Commander much like an old friend. "Bendarick."

"I'm sorry, Jeradon."

Holding out his arms, as though he knew what was coming next, Jeradon reluctantly replied, "Yes...so am I."

Bendarick raised his right hand and a guard stepped forward to cuff Jeradon's wrists. Then, with no hesitation, his old friend formally addressed him.

"Jeradon Horncastle III, the Newtonian Guild hereby arrests you..."

Pirian was speechless. It wasn't his father who had started the fire.

"For the murder of Lord Surel, Emperor of Newton."

## II

*Black. Cold.*

*Beat. Beating.*

His mind was trying to fight the darkness, but the slow pounding inside his head wasn't enough to keep him conscious. The dull thud was like an explosion growing louder and louder. Feeling the heat of the fire once more, he thought he was in the very depths of the inferno.

*Beating.*

*Feel? Feeling...*

*Open.*

*No. Yes, feeling cold. Open, try to open.*

*Noise, hear:*

*See...to see, seeing...open...eyes.*

*White. Cold. Open.*

He remembered nothing. His head was nothing but a box of broken toys; a jig-saw puzzle.

A white canvas lay before him. Piecing together his thoughts, he attempted to come up with a distinct picture.

*Feet?...No. Hands...my hands.*

*Beating. Pain.*

His head was now pounding like a drum. He remembered now that the surrounding whiteness had a name. It was no longer a metaphor.

Hands sunk into the coldness as he attempted to hold his own weight.

*Snow.*

Nearly losing consciousness again, the man pushed himself up and swayed for a moment in the snowstorm. Stumbling forward, he clutched at his chest. He was fully clothed, but lacked the warm garments for the harshness of winter.

*Snow, ice, cold. Warmth, fire, heat, food.*

Then, through the white, he saw the outline of a building. As he continued forward, more shapes came into view and before long the man was standing before a small bridge stretching over a frozen moat.

His own breath was the last thing he noticed, before he fell into darkness.

## Three

From her high-rise quarters, Neeve Horncastle looked across the expanse of Newton, her eyes fixed on the news blimps slowly passing by. Hanging from the surrounding skyscrapers, huge crimson banners rippled in the breeze. The Newtonian symbol rested at their base, casting its presence over the city; an imposing design resembling a crimson ‘w’, capped by a small dash, resting perfectly within a pristine white circle.

The synthetic relay of the news blimps added to the insult of her husband’s arrest with the announcement of Rayal Jakahn’s self appointed position of Emperor. Overlaying voices became a high pitched hum - she couldn’t listen to the brainwashing anymore, her ears having become far more sensitive than any User’s.

After her husband’s detention and the state her son was left in, Neeve could barely control her anger. It had taken her all day to calm Pirian, having not left his side for one moment.

“My Dad’s a good man.”

“We know that, Pirian,” assured Neeve, turning to tend his bruised face.

“I want to see him.”

“The dungeons are no place for a child.”

“I don’t care, I have to see him!”

Neeve stood up from the bed. “I know you mean no harm by upsetting your father and me, but you must listen to us, Pirian. It’s for your own good.” She placed a hand to her mouth, “Just look



at what's happened when you wandered off to the Greenhouse again. If you had not been there, Jakahn's thug of a son wouldn't have done this to you."

"They'd have done it to me anyway. Alva Greenhouse One was the only place left that I could hide from them. Now they've destroyed that. Destroyed Dad's hard work, once and for all."

"Houses can be rebuilt, even Greenhouses. But lives can't. You should be resting; you're lucky to be alive. If your father hadn't been there..."

"Exactly. That's why I have to be there for him. Tell him... tell him I'm sorry."

"I'm sure he knows. A son should never have to apologise to his father."

Neeve looked at her son, he reminded her so much of Jeradon. She was thankful he had at least been brought back to her in one piece, but there was still nothing to smile about. She rolled up his sleeve and injected his serum. It was the last Jeradon had concocted. Without the Greenhouse, there was no way of creating any more.

She knew that her son would die without it. Although it certainly wasn't the Dosage, it was a mild drug all the same, concocted from medicinal plants and herbs from the Greenhouses. Jeradon and Neeve had discovered early on that Pirian was reliant on their natural environment and the only way to prevent him slipping into a coma, or worse, was to inject him with a part of his birthplace.

Before long they were being flown low over the city by car.

Pirian was glad his mother had finally agreed that he could visit his father. However, he wasn't so pleased at having to fly; his stomach turning as he attempted to take in the approaching capital. Newton was an immense place, the traffic as loud and busy as any other day. The buildings became grander the closer

they flew to the centre; tall, striking monoliths bathed in sunlight, harsh shadows cast upon their ominous structure.

Eventually the car touched down in Ivar, the capital of Newton, where the dungeons were located at the core of the flying city. Untouched by modern design and technology, they were the oldest remaining remnants of the world below; dilapidated prison cells left to decay along with their prisoners over thousands of years. These cells, deep within the dungeon, were dark and grimy, dampness and lack of sanitation causing an unbearable stench. Newton's belly had always been a dungeon, even before it took to the sky. Dug out of the rock, it still remained rooted to the base of the city, like a rotting core.

Torches hung every so often from the walls, several extinguished by the water and slime dripping from the ceiling, only adding to the gloom of the dank, descending tunnel. Pirian and his mother were escorted down the winding stairs by two guards who took up most of the width with their sheer bulk. Covering her shaven head, Neeve wore a pale nondescript gown, the hood resting delicately on top of a uniformed headdress, which hung down over her shoulders. Her blue eyes were dulled by the darkness of the surroundings and by her husband's fate.

Holding his mother's hand tightly, Pirian was careful not to slip on the slimy steps as they reached the bottom. Turning a corner they came to a row of caged cells. Pirian couldn't help but look into each one as he walked by. The groans from some of the Prisoners were unsettling. There was a murmuring, as one repeatedly banged his head against the bars. The torchlight caught his eyeless face, cavernous, unblinking holes pleading for sight.

Burying his head in his mother's dress, they walked on.

They finally stopped before a cell door and a guard proceeded to unlock it. The heavy door swung open with a rusty clank. There stood Jeradon with his back to them, hands clasped behind

his back, posture like a rod of iron. Pirian expected nothing less from his father; Jeradon was holding onto something deep inside, refusing to show any signs of weakness. Jeradon hadn't even been given the privilege of a wash after the ordeal at the Greenhouse. His coat had been removed, revealing his torn and dirty shirt, bloodied further from his lashings. If he had been mentally tortured, he certainly didn't show it to his family.

The guards left without a word. Pirian's mother walked into the cell with her son and the door was closed behind them.

Jeradon continued to stand with his back to them as he began to speak. "Seems the final part of his plan has worked," he said. Then turning round to face his wife and son, he sighed. "Things can only get worse."

"Jeradon...?" Neeve clasped her hand to her mouth. "I don't believe for one second that you killed Lord Surel. But please, for your son...."

"He is dead, Neeve...I saw him with my own eyes...lying there, like..."

Neeve inhaled and held her breath, tears welling. "But I..." She struggled to speak. "You were there?"

"I was called to his quarters. Seems I was the last to be in his company." He stepped forward and held his wife. "There is no point saying I did or didn't cut his throat. I'm condemned either way. We both know that. I...we, have to protect our son. He's all that matters."

"What are you talking about?! We all matter, we're a family!" Neeve paused, as a cloud of doubt infected her mind. "It's him, isn't it? He's had it worked out all along, waiting for the right moment." She looked down at Pirian. "And the fire, it's all connected? They tried to kill our son as well?!"

"Dad...?" asked a concerned Pirian.

Jeradon looked down at him. "I'm sorry son, sorry for placing you in so much danger. But...we must be strong...we must be

prepared for what is to come. All of this is beginning to make more sense - Jakahn has longed to be Emperor and his power as Advisor has done nothing more than poison this city further. It's given him a solid grounding and his voice *is* heard. He knows that we're a threat, free of the Dosage." He paused, shaking his head. "Removing me from the picture has been well timed. I'm such a fool...I walked right into it."

"But what about Pirian, he's only a boy?"

"He doesn't want any of the underclass clean. The Dosage is law. The fact we are Horncastles just makes things worse. We are a huge threat."

"I'm a Horncastle, does that mean he's planning to kill me as well?" asked Neeve.

"I think we both know that's not going to happen."

"Please...Jeradon..." she pleaded, looking down at their son.

"Pirian knows, Neeve. Jakahn's son has taunted him about it long enough. It's not just Newton he has wanted...we've always known that."

It was true. For months now Viktor had taunted Pirian about getting rid of him and his father. He knew that Viktor's own father had other motives towards his mother.

"I'd rather die," sobbed Neeve, holding her husband's hand to her cheek. "I can't go back to that."

"Neeve, listen to me. You must be strong. Take Pirian with you and contact the Resistance, before it's too late. You must warn them about Jakahn's intentions. There are no rogue Guildsmen left to support the cause, they've even got to Bendarick. There is so much to tell and I am running out of time. Most of the prisoners here are the people that had faith in me. They no longer rely on the Dosage and they'd have supported my actions. This New Order will be through *his* eyes now, and with the city as brainwashed as it has ever been, he'll be unstoppable."

“How will contacting the Resistance help you?”

Jeradon held her close. “It won’t, but I am hoping they will help you and Pirian. He’s already Emperor and now there is no one to oppose him. Myself and the rest of the prisoners will be executed.”

Pirian rushed forward, lashing out with his fists. “Dad! No! Say you didn’t do it! Say it!”

Jeradon grabbed his wrists then knelt down holding him close in an attempt to comfort his son. “Pirian...”

The cell opened and two guards walked in, standing either side of the heavy door. Dampened footsteps approached, then a man stood in the doorway for a brief moment before entering the cell. Torchlight caught his sharp features, casting harsh shadows on a ghostly white face. His ginger hair was tied back and receded, revealing a sharp hairline. Coils of teased hair hung down over his sideburns, which feathered outwards, while an equally groomed goatee decorated his chin.

The newly, self-appointed, Emperor was in traditional attire; pristine crimson suit, black pin stripe down the trouser leg; zig-zagging above knee high boots. A long robe hung down from his shoulders, the Newtonian symbol clipping it around his neck. Wrapped over one arm, he held the robe from the slimy floor.

Pirian immediately noticed the glance Royal Jakahn gave his mother.

Relishing the moment, he then gave Jeradon a wholly satisfied look. “How quaint to have a family get together,” he said smugly, pulling at his beard. “Touching. Still I’m not one to split up families in their time of need. A man needs his wife for that little extra support; especially one who has committed such a terrible crime.”

He looked down at Pirian, “Ouch. Looks as though your boy’s been in the wars.”

“What do you want, Jakahn?” snapped Jeradon.

Pirian flinched as Rayal raised his hand, snapping his fingers. The two guards left the cell, closing the door behind them, while Rayal moved one step closer to Jeradon. "I think we both know the answer to that."

"No...you can't do this!" shouted Neeve.

"Oh? I think you will find, dear, that I can do what I want. I'm the Emperor now and I wish for many things to be changed around here. The first being public execution for your husband..." he paused, "...and son."

Neeve began to shake uncontrollably. She opened her mouth, but no sound came out. Pirian gave out a scream and held onto his father.

"Leave Pirian out of this, Rayal, he's just a boy. Do you think executing a child will do you any favours? This is about you and me!"

"Oh please...your son is as much a problem to me as you are. You know as well as I do that you have no more of your precious serum for his sickness."

"That doesn't condone execution you heartless bas..." Jeradon bit his tongue, his rage swelling inside. Taking a quick breath he continued. "Newton will wake up to killing a child."

"Perhaps, perhaps not. I can always increase the Dosage. Besides, we all know the punishment for owning one of these." Rayal held out the book that Viktor had taken from Pirian. "So you continue to encourage independent thought in a child - rebellious youth born out of the written word. Newton isn't about inspiring our people to climb trees and look towards a promised land. I guess that doesn't matter to you, so why should any of this matter to me? The thing is, I don't need a reason. Nothing shocks Newton. The Dosage even blinds them to murder...it clouds everything and controls everyone - cuts off emotion like a severed limb. None of these people need to read, or communicate at all to each other - they just listen and do as they are told."

“Your little Empire.” added Jeradon.

Jakahn sneered, “If Viktor had done his little job properly, you’d be none the wiser about the death of your son.”

Jeradon lurched forward with ferocious speed. Grasping Rayal by the throat he pushed him against the cell door. Jeradon grunted, clenching his teeth.

Pirian had never seen so much fury from his father; as if he had suddenly tapped into something dark and channelled. “I knew it! You really are something, Jakahn!” shouted Jeradon.

Gagging, Rayal stared directly into Jeradon’s eyes. “You see...you see emotion my friend; it’s a real killer.” He raised his hand. “I only have to snap my fingers...and you’ll be torn apart before your family. Would you really want them to see that?”

Pirian and Neeve watched in horror as Jeradon’s grip tightened around Rayal’s throat. “Dad...don’t...”

Even without the Dosage, Jeradon’s Guild training was an automatic reflex. From the age of five, all Newtonians who measured up to A-class, began to channel and focus their enhanced strength and ferocity. Newton had created the perfect killing machine; one that only knew how to answer to the Hierarchy.

“Newton may have always had the Guild brainwashed, Rayal, but they will only protect you for so long. One day they will wake up.”

“They’ll be gone before it comes to that. I have other plans. In the meantime, they can continue with the crusade. As long as they believe they are looking for something of importance on Erth, there is no need for any Guildsman to return home. This way I can have them securing all the protonium we need; our precious fuel.”

Jeradon slammed him against the cell wall one last time. “I knew it! There is no artefact! It’s just an excuse!”

Rayal shrugged, as though he didn’t care either way. But the

mysterious artefact; the object for which Newton had searched across an eternity, held more answers than Jeradon's Greenhouses had ever offered. Rayal hoped controlling the protonium fields one by one, would eventually point him to the artefact. There were still thousands of outposts scattered across Erth that belonged to their enemy, the Rojin - outposts that, could still lead to their capital city and the very artefact Newton was looking for.

There was a silence as Rayal looked over at Neeve. "There is one thing that could save you and your son."

Jeradon caught Rayal's eye.

Neeve took her hands away from her mouth. *How easy it would be*, she thought, *to stab out your eyes and be done with you*. At least then she could join her family in death. But she knew all too well what was coming. They all knew.

"You'd release them...for me?" asked Neeve.

"Oh my dear, no. I'd give them a choice other than trial and execution."

"A choice," muttered Jeradon under his breath, as he slowly released his grip on Rayal's throat. He pondered for a moment on how a trial would make no difference, then placed both hands up against the wall, shaking his head slowly in desperation.

"Neeve stays with me and becomes Empress. In return I will spare your lives. There will be no trial - you will simply be outcast with the rest of the scum. Kind of a 'cleansing of Newton' if you will. You'll become Fallen," answered Rayal, flattening his hair after Jeradon's assault.

"Then you may as well execute us. If we become Fallen, the chance of survival is a thousand to one."

"Mmmm. Well, at least you get to see Erth again. Perhaps the Rojin will welcome you with as much affection as my good self; especially as you're responsible for killing so many of their people. Those were the days, hey old friend?"

Pirian's stomach turned at the thought of Rayal and his father



side by side. Jeradon was no longer a killer and no one could convince Pirian otherwise. Even if it came from his father's mouth.

"I've changed."

"So I noticed. Just look where it's got you. Lord Surel was a fool to allow you to be clean."

Neeve detested seeing her husband tormented like this. Sensing his pain, she couldn't stand the ridicule of the man she loved any longer. "I'll do it," she interrupted glancing at her husband. "I'll go with you."

Jeradon pushed himself away from the wall and looked his wife in the eye. "No," he whispered.

"I have no choice. At least if you are outcast there is a chance you'll survive."

Pirian was speechless, burying his head further. What was his mother saying?

"Then it's settled," added Rayal.

Jeradon slackened his tense fists. He continued to look across at Neeve as she knelt and held their son. She knew as well as her husband that this was the only chance of survival Pirian had. Without his serum, he would die anyway.

"Mum, I don't want to leave, I can't..."

"Pirian, it's the only way. You must go with your father, he'll look after you. I'll be alright, I'll be safe here on Newton. You must be brave...both of you."

The thought of his mother with Rayal, brainwashed once again by the Dosage, sent a chill down Pirian's spine.

With her back to Rayal, Neeve looked her husband in the eye. The pain was unbearable.

"Neeve..." whispered Jeradon.

She put a finger to his mouth and whispered, "Don't say anything. Just look after our boy. You know as well as I do, he's dead either way. There is more chance for him on Erth. Keep

him safe, I can take care of myself. Just don't forget me, Jeradon Horncastle, one of us has to keep our memory alive."

Tears welled in her eyes.

Jeradon felt his throat constrict, preventing him from saying anything.

Neeve addressed Rayal while still looking her husband in the eye. "When are they to be outcast?"

The tension was unbearable while she awaited his answer.

"This evening."

### III

“Get away from him, child, he could be diseased.”

“No, he’s healthy. I think he may be from...”

*Voices.*

*Open your...eyes.*

“Praise the Erth. He’s awake, father!”

The warmth of a touch.

He thought his eyes were playing tricks on him. Before there was only white, now a serene face looked down upon him. If only he could speak. If only he could think of a word that could describe...

*Beau...*

He tried to say the word, but it remained locked within his mind.

Was he still a boy? Or was he a man?

He didn’t know anything. He couldn’t remember anything.

The few words that rattled around in his head were the first thoughts of his mind crying out.

Awake, only asleep. Found, yet still lost.

It was her eyes that pierced his very soul. Blue eyes. The first he had ever seen, or at least the first he could ever remember. Her skin was fair, delicate and untouched. Her dark hair was tied back, a wisp hanging down over her face.

She tucked it behind her ear.

He tried to speak once again, but his head pounded once more. Turning his head away and closing his eyes tightly, he

attempted to block the pain.

She placed her hand on his forehead as he fell into darkness once more.

*Green.*

*Blue.*

*The Sky...falling.*

And then he saw something else he couldn't describe. What was it? Words almost familiar.

"F...Father," he murmured.

The young woman had sat at his bedside the whole day. Startled at the man's voice, she leant in closer.

"Yes...?" she whispered in reply, unsure of what he'd just said. "It's ok, you're safe."

"Rrrr...." he could barely catch his breath. "Jrrr...J...Jinnnn.

"Jinn...? puzzled the woman. "Your name?"

"Jrr...Jinn." He could see the bright light once again, so bright it was blinding. Briefly he saw something flash before him, something he couldn't recognise. Then the light became a woman's face. As he slowly opened his eyes he no longer saw anything. "My...name?"

She looked down at his unfocussed eyes and realised the man was blind.



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