



Straits of Hell (Destroyermen)

By Taylor Anderson

Download now

Read Online ➔

Straits of Hell (Destroyermen) By Taylor Anderson

***New York Times* bestselling author Taylor Anderson's phenomenal series of alternate history continues as a dangerous scheme throws the hope of honor, trust, and survival into chaos....**

Transported to an alternate version of earth where WWII no longer rages, Matt Reddy and the crew of the Asiatic Fleet destroyer USS Walker have been trying to find their place in a strange new world—only to now face a game-changing conspiracy.

Reddy and his crew fight alongside the felinoid Lemurians and Imperial allies to keep the reptilian Grik, a race growing in supremacy, from reconquering the Lemurians' ancestral home on Madagascar. But exhausted, far from reinforcements, and wildly outnumbered, the odds seem greater than ever before.

As for the fate of the Americas, Don Hernan and the evil Dominion have gathered to annihilate the forces behind the walls of Fort Defiance as a shadowy power with an agenda all its own rises with chilling resolve.

As the war teeters on a knife-edge, a tipping point may have been reached at last—and cold steel and hot-blooded valor will remain the ultimate weapons.

📄 [Download Straits of Hell \(Destroyermen\) ...pdf](#)

📖 [Read Online Straits of Hell \(Destroyermen\) ...pdf](#)

Straits of Hell (Destroyermen)

By Taylor Anderson

Straits of Hell (Destroyermen) By Taylor Anderson

New York Times bestselling author Taylor Anderson's phenomenal series of alternate history continues as a dangerous scheme throws the hope of honor, trust, and survival into chaos....

Transported to an alternate version of earth where WWII no longer rages, Matt Reddy and the crew of the Asiatic Fleet destroyer USS Walker have been trying to find their place in a strange new world—only to now face a game-changing conspiracy.

Reddy and his crew fight alongside the felinoid Lemurians and Imperial allies to keep the reptilian Grik, a race growing in supremacy, from reconquering the Lemurians' ancestral home on Madagascar. But exhausted, far from reinforcements, and wildly outnumbered, the odds seem greater than ever before.

As for the fate of the Americas, Don Hernan and the evil Dominion have gathered to annihilate the forces behind the walls of Fort Defiance as a shadowy power with an agenda all its own rises with chilling resolve.

As the war teeters on a knife-edge, a tipping point may have been reached at last—and cold steel and hot-blooded valor will remain the ultimate weapons.

Straits of Hell (Destroyermen) By Taylor Anderson Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #231964 in Books
- Published on: 2016-05-03
- Released on: 2016-05-03
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 6.75" h x 1.03" w x 4.13" l, 1.00 pounds
- Binding: Mass Market Paperback
- 480 pages

 [Download Straits of Hell \(Destroyermen\) ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Straits of Hell \(Destroyermen\) ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Straits of Hell (Destroyermen) By Taylor Anderson

Editorial Review

Review

Praise for the Destroyermen series

“Taylor Anderson...[has] steamed to the forefront of alternative history.”—E. E. Knight, national bestselling author

“A new, genuinely different ‘alternate Earth’ story.”—David Weber, *New York Times* bestselling author

“Gripping and riveting...I look forward to the unfolding of this series and his subsequent work.”—S.M. Stirling, *New York Times* bestselling author

“Pick up the Destroyermen series and kick back and enjoy.”—SFRevu

“Action sci-fi doesn’t get significantly better than this.”—*Booklist*

“Simply put, this is great stuff.”—Fresh Fiction

About the Author

Taylor Anderson is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the Destroyermen series, including *Straits of Hell*, *Deadly Shores*, and *Storm Surge*. A gunmaker and forensic ballistic archaeologist, Taylor has been a technical and dialogue consultant for movies and documentaries, and an award-winning member of the National Historical Honor Society and of the United States Field Artillery Association. He has a master’s degree in history and has taught that subject at Tarleton State University in Stephenville, Texas. He lives in nearby Granbury with his family.

Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

THE DESTROYERMEN SERIES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(The following does not necessarily reflect initial or even final deployments, but only those most pertinent to the events described.)

See index for details of ships and equipment specifications.

Note:

(L)—*Lemurians, or Mi-Anakka (People) are bipedal, somewhat felinoid folk with large eyes, fur, and expressive but nonprehensile tails. They are highly intelligent, social, and dexterous. It has been proposed that they are descended from the giant lemurs of Madagascar.*

(G)—*Grik, or Ghaarrichk’k, are bipedal reptilians reminiscent of various Mesozoic dromaeosaurids. Covered with fine downy fur, males develop bristly crests and tail plumage, and retain formidable teeth and claws. Grik society consists of two distinct classes, the ruling or industrious Hij, and the worker-warrior Uul. The basic Grik-like form is ubiquitous, and serves as a foundation for numerous unassociated races and species.*

At “Grik City” Madagascar

USS Walker (DD-163)

Lt. Cmdr. Matthew Patrick Reddy, USNR—Commanding. CINCAF—(Commander in Chief of All Allied Forces).

Cmdr. Brad “Spanky” McFarlane—Exec. Minister of Naval Engineering.

Cmdr. Bernard Sandison—Torpedo Officer and Minister of Experimental Ordnance.

Lt. Tab-At, “Tabby” (L)—Engineering Officer.

Lt. Sonny Campeti—Gunnery Officer.

Lt. Ed Palmer—Signals.

Surgeon Lieutenant Pam Cross

Cmdr. Simon Herring—Office of Strategic Intelligence (OSI).

Ensign Laar-Baa-Ra (L)—PB-1B “Nancy” pilot.

Chief Quartermaster Patrick “Paddy” Rosen—Acting First Officer.

Chief Boatswain’s Mate Jeek (L)—Former Crew Chief, “Special Air Division.”

Chief Engineer Isak Reuben—One of the “original” Mice.

Gunner’s Mate Pak-Ras-Ar, “Pack Rat” (L)

Earl Lanier—Cook.

Johnny Parks—Machinist’s Mate.

Juan Marcos—Officer’s Steward.

Wallace Fairchild—Sonarman—Anti-Mountain Fish Countermeasures—(AMF-DIC).

Min-Sakir, “Minnie”(L)—Bridge Talker.

Leftenant Doocy Meek—British sailor and former POW (WWI). Now liaison for the Republic of Real People.

Corporal Neely—Imperial Marine Bugler.

Salissa Battle Group

USNRS Salissa “Big Sal” (CV-1)

Admiral Keje-Fris-Ar (L)

Atlaan-Fas (L)—Commanding.

Lt. Sandy Newman—Exec.

1st Naval Air Wing

Captain Jis-Tikkar, “Tikker” (L)—“COFO” (Commander of Flight Operations); 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Bomb Squadron, and 1st and 2nd Pursuit Squadrons aboard *Salissa* (CV-1).

Lt. Araa-Faan (L)—Tikker’s Aryaalan Exec.

Frigates (DDs) attached: (Des-Ron 6)

USS Haakar-Faask**

Lt. Cmdr. Niaal-Ras-Kavaat (L)—Commanding.

USS Tassat**

Captain Jarrik-Fas (L)—Commanding.

Lt. Stanly Raj—“Impie” Exec.

USS Scott***

Cmdr. Muraak-Saanga (L)—Commanding. (Former *Donaghey* Exec and sailing master).

USS Nakja-Mur*

Lt. Naala-Araan [Cmdr. Cablaas-Rag-Laan (L) has been reassigned].

MTB-Ron-1 (Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron #1)—5xMTBs (#s 4, 7, 13, 15, 16).

Aef-M (Allied Expeditionary Force—Madagascar).

II Corps

General Queen Safir Maraan (L)—Commanding.

3rd Division

General Mersaak (L)—Commanding. “The 600” (B’mbaado Regiment composed of Silver and Black

battalions), Exec 3rd Baalkpan, 3rd, 10th B'mbaado, 5th Sular, 1st Battalion, 2nd Marines, 1st Sular.

6th Division

General Grisa—Commanding.

5th, 6th B'mbaado, 1st, 2nd, 9th Aryaal, 3rd Sular

1st Allied Raider Brigade (“Chack’s Raiders,” or “Chack’s Brigade”)

Lt. Col Chack-Sab-At (L)—Commanding—bosun’s mate (Marine Lt. Colonel).

21st (combined) Allied Regiment

Major Alistair Jindal—Commanding—Imperial Marine, and Chack’s nominal Exec.

1st and 2nd battalions of the 9th Maa-Ni-Laa, 2nd Battalion of the 1st Respite

7th (combined) Allied Regiment

Captain Risa Sab-At (L)—Commanding—(Chack’s sister).

2nd and 3rd battalions of the 19th Baalkpan, 1st Battalion of the 11th Imperial Marines

1st Cavalry Brigade

Lt. Colonel Saachic (L)—Commanding.

3rd and 6th Maa-ni-laa Cavalry

SMS Amerika

Kapitan Adler Von Melhausen—Commanding.

Kapitan Leutnant Becker Lange—Von Melhausen’s Exec.

Adar (L)—Chairman of the Grand Alliance (COTGA), and High Chief and Sky Priest of Baalkpan.

Surgeon Commander Sandra Tucker Reddy—Minister of Medicine, and wife of Captain Reddy.

Diania—Steward’s Assistant and Sandra’s friend and bodyguard.

Gunnery Sergeant Arnold Horn—USMC—formerly of the 4th Marines (US).

Lieutenant Toryu Miyata—formerly of *Amagi*.

MISSION TO MEET “ANCESTRAL” LEMURIANS:

Ensign Nathaniel Hardee—Commanding PT-7.

Courtney Bradford—Australian naturalist and engineer. Minister of Science for the Grand Alliance and Plenipotentiary at Large.

Chief Gunner's Mate Dennis Silva

Lawrence "Larry the Lizard"—orange and brown tiger-striped Grik-like ex-Tagranesi (Sa'aaran).

Corporal Ian Miles—Formerly in 2nd of the 4th Marines.

The "Republic of Real People"

Caesar (Kaiser) Nig-Taak

General Marcus Kim—Military High Command.

TFG-2 (Task Force Garrett-2)

(Long-Range Reconnaissance and Exploration)

USS Donaghey (DD-2)

Cmdr. Greg Garrett—Commanding.

Lt. Saama-Kera, "Sammy" (L)—Exec.

Lt. (jg) Wendel "Smitty" Smith—Gunnery Officer.

Captain Bekiaa-Sab-At—Commanding Marines.

Chief Bosun's Mate Jenaar-Laan

Inquisitor Kon-Choon—Director of Spies for the Republic of Real People.

In Indiaa

Allied Expeditionary Force (North)

General of the Army and Marines Pete Alden—Commanding. Former sergeant in USS *Houston* Marine contingent.

I Corps

General Lord Muln-Rolak (L)—Commanding.

Hij Geerki—Rolak's "pet" Grik, captured at Rangoon.

1st (Galla) Division

General Taa-leen (L)—Commanding.

Colonel Enaak (L) (5th Maa-ni-laa Cavalry)—Exec.

1st Marines, 5th, 6th, 7th, 10th Baalkpan

2nd Division

General Rin-Taaka-Ar (L)—Commanding.

Major Simon “Simy” Gutfeld (3rd Marines)—Exec.

1st, 2nd Maa-Ni-Laa, 4th, 6th, 7th Aryaal

III Corps

General Faan-Ma-Mar (L)—Commanding.

9th & 11th Divisions composed of the 2nd, 3rd Maa-ni-laa, 8th Baalkpan, 7th & 8th Maa-ni-la, 10th Aryaal

VI Corps

General Linnaa-Fas-Ra—Commanding.

The “Czech Legion”—**Colonel Dalibor SVEC**—Commanding. A near-division-level “cavalry” force of aging Czechs and Slovaks, and their continental Lemurian allies. They are militarily, if not politically, bound to the Grand Alliance.

Flynn Field—Primary Army/Navy air base in Indiaa, on the north shore of Lake Flynn, west of Madraas.

Colonel Ben Mallory—Commanding.

Lt. Cmdr. Mark Leedom—Exec.

4th 5th, 7th, 8th Bomb Squadrons (PB-1B Nancys), and 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th Pursuit Squadrons (P-1C Mosquito Hawks “Fleashooters”). The 3rd Pursuit Squadron is composed of 9 Army Air Corps P-40Es.

Lt. Walt “Jumbo” Fisher

Lt. (jg) Suaak-Pas-Ra “Soupy” (L)

Lt. Conrad Diebel

2nd Lt. Niaa-Saa “Shirley” (L)

S. Sergeant Cecil Dixon

At Madras (Indiaa)

First Fleet North

USS Santa Catalina (CAP-1)

Lt. Cmdr. Russ Chappelle—Commanding.

Lt. Michael “Mikey” Monk—Exec.

Lt. (jg) Dean Laney—Engineering Officer.

Surgeon Cmdr. Kathy McCoy

Stanley “Dobbin” Dobson—Chief Bosun’s Mate.

USS Mahan (DD-102)

Cmdr. Perry Brister—Commanding. Minister of Defensive and Industrial Works.

Lt. (jg) Jeff Brooks—Sonarman—Anti-Mountain Fish Countermeasures—(AMF-DIC).

Lt. (jg) Rolando “Ronson” Rodriguez—Chief Electrician.

Taarba-Kaar, “Tabasco” (L)—Cook.

Chief Bosun’s Mate Carl Bashear

Ensign Johnny Parks—Engineering Officer.

Ensign Paul Stites—Gunnery Officer.

Arracca Battle Group

USNRS Arracca (CV-3)

Tassanna-Ay-Arracca (L), High Chief—Commanding.

5th Naval Air Wing

Frigates (DDs) attached: (Des-Ron 9)

USS Kas-Ra-Ar**—Captain Mescus-Ricum (L)—Commanding.

USS Ramic-Sa-Ar*

USS Felts**

USS Naga***

USS Bowles***

USS Saak-Fas***

USS Clark**

At Baalkpan

Cmdr. Alan Letts—Chief of Staff, Minister of Industry and the Division of Strategic Logistics. Acting “Chairman” of the Grand Alliance.

Cmdr. Steve “Sparks” Riggs—Minister of Communications and Electrical Contrivances.

Lord Bolton Forester—Imperial Ambassador.

Lt. Bachman—Forester’s aide.

Surgeon Cmdr. Karen Theimer Letts—Assistant Minister of Medicine.

“Pepper” (L)—Black-and-white Lemurian keeper of the “Castaway Cook,” (Busted Screw).

Leading Seaman Henry Stokes, HMAS Perth—Assistant Director of Office of Strategic Intelligence—(OSI).

Among the Khonashi (North Borno)

“King” Tony Scott

“Captain” I’joorka—Respected warrior and Scott’s friend.

Ensign Abel Cook—Commanding Allied Mission.

Imperial Midshipman Stuart Brassey

Moe the Hunter

Pokey—“Pet” Grik brass-picker.

Eastern Sea Campaign

High Admiral Harvey Jenks (CINCEAST)

Enchanted Isles

Sir Thomas Humphries—Imperial Governor at Albermarl.

Colonel Alexander—Garrison commander.

Second Fleet

USS Maaka-Kakja (CV-4)

Admiral Lelaa-Tal-Cleraan (L)—Commanding.

Lieutenant Tex Sheider (Sparks)—Exec.

Gilbert Yeager—Engineer; one of the “original” Mice.

3rd Naval Air Wing

(9th, 11th, 12th Bomb Squadrons & 7th, 10th Pursuit Squadrons.) (30 planes assembled, 30 unassembled)

2nd Lt. Orrin Reddy—COFO.

Sgt. Kuaar-Ran-Taak “Seepy” (L)—Reddy’s “backseater.”

Line of Battle

24 Imperial Ships of the Line Including:

HIMSS Mars*, Centurion*, Mithra

*Attached to TF-11 commanded by Imperial **Admiral E. B. Hibbs**

DDs (of note)

USS Mertz***

USS Tindal***

USS Finir-Pel***

Lt. Haan-Sor Plaar (L)—Commanding.

HIMS Achilles Lt. Grimsley—Commanding.

HIMS Icarus

Lt. Parr—Commanding.

USS Simms***

Lt. Ruik-Sor-Raa (L)—Commanding.

USS Pinaa-Tubo (**Ammunition ship**)

Lt. Radaa-Nin (L)—Commanding.

USS Pecos—Fleet Oiler.

USS Pucot—Fleet Oiler.

Second Fleet Expeditionary Force: (X Corps)—4 regiments Lemurian Army and Marines, 2 regiments “Frontier” troops, 5 regiments Imperial Marines—(3 Divisions) w/artillery train.

General Tomatsu Shinya—Commanding.

Colonel James Blair—Exec.

Major Dao Iverson—Commanding Second Battalion, 6th Imperial Marines.

Nurse Cmdr. Selass-Fris-Ar (L)—“Doc’selass” Daughter of Keje-Fris-Ar.

Capt. Blas-Ma-Ar “Blossom” (L)—Commanding 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marines.

Spon-Ar-Aak “Spook” (L)—Gunner’s Mate, and 1st Sgt. of “A” Company, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marines.

Lt. Staas-Fin “Finny” (L)—“C” Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Maa-ni-laa.

Lt. Faal-Pel “Stumpy” (L)—“A” Company, 1st Battalion, 8th Maa-ni-la. Former ordnance striker.

Lt. (jg) Fred Reynolds—Formerly Special Air Division—USS *Walker*.

Ensign Kari-Faask (L)—Reynolds’s friend and “backseater.”

Army of the Sisters

Saan-Kakja (L)—High Chief of Ma-ni-laa and all the Filpin Lands.

Governor-Empress Rebecca Anne McDonald

Sister Audry—Benedictine nun, and commander of El Vengadores de Dios, a regiment raised from penitent Dominion POWs on New Ireland.

Colonel Arano Garcia

Lt. Ezekial Krish

General Ansik-Talaa (L)—Filpin Scouts.

Sergeant “Lord” Koratin (L)—Marine protector and advisor to Sister Audry.

Attached DDs:

HIMS Ulysses, Euripides, Tacitus

Enemies

General of the Sea Hisashi Kurokawa—Formerly of Japanese Imperial Navy battle cruiser *Amagi*. Self-proclaimed “Regent” and “Sire” of all India, but currently confined to Zanzibar.

General Orochi Niwa—friend and advisor to General Halik.

“General of the Sky” Hideki Muriname

“Lieutenant of the Sky” Iguri—Muriname’s Exec.

Signal Lt. Fukui

Cmdr. Riku—Ordnance.

Grik (Ghaarrichk’k)

Celestial Mother—Absolute, godlike ruler of all the Grik, regardless of the relationships between the various Regencies.

The Chooser—Highest member of his “order” at the court of the Celestial Mother. Prior to current policy, “choosers” selected those destined for life—or the cook pots—as well as those eligible for “elevation” to “Hij” status.

Ragak—Regent Consort of Sofesshk.

General Esshk—First General of all the Grik, and acting Champion Consort to the new Celestial Mother.

General Ign—Commander of Esshk’s “new” warriors.

General Halik—Elevated Uul sport fighter.

General Ugla, General Shlook—"Promising" Grik leaders under Halik's command.

Holy Dominion

His Supreme Holiness, Messiah of Mexico, and by the Grace of God, Emperor of the World—"Dom Pope" and absolute ruler.

Don Hernan DeDivino Dicha—"Blood Cardinal" and new commander of the "Army of God."

General Ghanan Nerino

League of Tripoli

Representatives at Zanzibar:

(French) Capitaine de Fregate Victor Gravois

Aspirant Gilles Babin

(Spanish) Commandante Fidel Morrillo

(Italian) Maggiore Antonio Rizzo

Teniente Francisco de Luca

(German) Oberleutnant Walbert Fiedler

If I have discovered one genuinely profound truth in all my travels and adventures, it is this: mercy is a moral construct that does not exist in nature. No unthinking (as we would define it) creature possesses the merest notion of mercy. Raw nature quite literally subscribes only to the "law of the jungle" in which creatures kill, or are killed, for food, territory, breeding opportunities, and, yes, even pleasure. Those on the world from whence we came who naively maintained that Man is the only animal that kills for pleasure are fools—who have never seen their beloved, sated house cat torment its prey in the most horrid fashion. Their little monster is not hungry, nor does it fear for its life. Its prey, a small bird or mouse, for example, threatens no competition for territory or breeding opportunities. Their sweet pet tortures and kills without pity for amusement alone. Some may call this "instinct," but does that then mean that cruelty is "instinctive"?

Mercy is unknown in the animal kingdom, there or here. What predator will release its prey with a contrite countenance at the sound of a pitiful bleat or the panicked, hungry cries of its young that only it can tend? None whatsoever, for pity's sake, even when to make the slightest effort to slaughter the now-doomed offspring would be the greatest kindness it could do them. And when one mistakenly ascribes benevolent

intent to some beast in its natural habitat, what one truly sees is complacency and satiation, even fear of personal injury. It is surely not a moral choice to do no harm.

The notion of “mercy” began simply enough among humans, on our “old world,” and is perhaps best defined here as unexpectedly refraining from causing death or harm to another being that either “deserves” to die, or that it is in one’s nature—or best interest—to slay. The earliest mention of the word “mercy,” to my knowledge, comes to us from the Old Testament, when God spared Lot from the destruction he rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah. That, however, might be cynically explained as the practice, common at the time, of allowing a few witnesses of a terrible act or massacre to go forth and spread the word of what will happen to others who do not submit to, or obey, a conquering king, warlord—or God. I strive to resist cynicism of that sort as best I can, though the struggle does grow tedious at times. Still, I endeavor to adhere to my own considered definition of mercy, which, simply put, is to avoid killing anything, either beast or sentient being, just because it appears menacing. Some may, on occasion, disagree with my personal judgment regarding whether certain creatures “need” killing, and I confess I may have been mistaken a time or two, but death is so amazingly permanent that I do prefer to “err” on the side of mercy when I can.

So. If mercy is not “natural,” then the question would seem to be: from what does it spring? The Grik did not know mercy, as a race, though General Halik once demonstrated surprising restraint when he agreed to an exchange of prisoners. Clearly, that was in his interest at the time, and one might argue that true mercy was no part of his equation. Or was it? Subsequent behavior, addressed later, may pose that question to readers again, or to philosophers of another, gentler time.

Lemurians did not show mercy to their enemies until we taught it to them—but do most understand it even yet? I wonder. Some do. Chack-Sab-At showed it to the beaten Doms on New Ireland, for example, when he had to be tempted to slaughter them all. But Chack was ever remarkable in many ways—and Doms were not Grik. What if they had been? Would any have been spared? Is mercy so selective? Once the most peaceful of races—with some interesting exceptions—Chack’s people embraced the warrior’s path so quickly and firmly that I still remain at somewhat of a loss to explain it. No doubt they were strongly influenced by self-preservation, the most powerful instinct of all, but their apparently latent talent for war, which we encouraged, argues vigorously for the thesis that their passivity was never instinctual and they were not always as peaceful as when we met—and as their only relatively recent histories suggest. Lemurians are generally good people who understand compassion and friendship, and who are amazingly tolerant of other races with which they share basic values. But I personally witnessed some few displays of what I considered quite uncharacteristic . . . harshness at the time; more like the aforementioned house cat than any thinking being. Granted, they’d had little enough “mercy” shown them across the ages, so the concept must have been difficult for them to grasp. I suspect many showed restraint toward their enemies when occasionally asked, at least at first, only to please us.

Apparently only my human friends from Walker, and then the Empire of the New Britain Isles, fully understood the concept of mercy in those early years to the point that they not only desired it for themselves but were willing to grant it on occasion. Does that mean that humans in general are more devoted to mercy? No. The people of the evil Dominion were human, just like us, but on the whole the “true believers” of their twisted faith behaved just as cruelly as the Grik. If anything, they were worse. And those who did learn mercy—and appreciated it when it was shown them—as evidenced by Arano Garcia and his troops, who swore their oaths to Sister Audry and Governor-Empress Rebecca McDonald, had to throw off entire lifetimes of indoctrination to accept mercy and learn what it was.

Could that be the trick, then? I have no doubt that mercy is a gift from God. He has surely shown me enough of it in my life! But does the understanding of mercy spring forth, fully formed, within our infant hearts? I think not. I have come to believe that no being is born to mercy, but to know it and show it to others, one

must first discover it. Perhaps the example must come as God once demonstrated it to Lot. Indeed, the Grand Alliance, which now includes the Union that sprang from a portion of it, has embraced that method a time or two. I would hope it is still possible that the lesson might come as my loving mother gently gifted it to me. But either way, if instruction truly is the key, it may be that one day we can teach it all across this new world of ours to any being capable of inspiration . . . unless, of course, perpetually assailed as we are by merciless foes, we ultimately forget all about mercy ourselves.

CHAPTER 1

///// Zanzibar
Airfield #1
Near Menai Bay

“I am . . . uncomfortable with this meeting, my lord,” General of the Sky Hideki Muriname cautiously admitted to Hisashi Kurokawa. The small, narrow-faced, balding officer had been *Amagi*’s last surviving pilot for her sole remaining Type 95 floatplane, and he’d since created an air fleet of dirigibles and helped train countless aircrews for their Grik allies. He’d also been responsible for creating an entirely different—secret—air force for Hisashi Kurokawa, and the stress of that might have contributed more to his baldness than anything else. He gauged the reaction of the brooding . . . madman who stood beside him (even Muriname no longer doubted Kurokawa was mad), who had become, for all intents and purposes, his emperor on this world. A furious grimace split Kurokawa’s round face, and Muriname instinctively prepared for one of his leader’s signature vitriolic rants. Instead, he watched with mounting relief as Kurokawa visibly controlled his rage and his expression changed to a rational frown. Lately, he’d been managing that more often than not. Muriname had to admit that his lord, mad or not, was a brilliant man—and an extraordinarily capable survivor. That their current situation was so much better than he could’ve dared hope just a few short months before—almost entirely due to Kurokawa’s obsessive, manic determination—was conclusive proof of that. And for better or worse, Muriname knew his own destiny was irrevocably linked to Hisashi Kurokawa’s.

Muriname glanced back at the cloudy sky they’d been staring at all morning while Kurokawa contemplated a measured reply, dabbing at the sweat on his forehead with a brilliant white pocket handkerchief. He almost snorted at the sight of it. The Grik had never denied even the most frivolous requests by their Japanese benefactors during their association, and he’d used that openhandedness to amass far more than handkerchiefs on his “Sovereign Nest” of Zanzibar.

“I confess that I am . . . less than enthusiastic myself, General of the Sky Muriname,” Kurokawa finally said, affecting a mild tone. He’d continued using Muriname’s Grik title, just as he had his own, “General of the Sea.” He’d gotten used to it, and rather enjoyed it now. He still considered himself “Regent of All India” as well, but reasserting that—and more—would have to wait.

“We don’t need these strangers!” Commander Riku, head of Ordnance, flared. “We have our own army and navy now”—he bowed to Muriname—“and our own air fleet as well. All better than anything the Americans and their ape-man lackeys—or even the Grik—can muster!”

That was more than likely true, Kurokawa mused, but they’d believed that before. The 354 Japanese survivors of the battle cruiser *Amagi* now gathered on the island had supervised the construction of the Grik war machine from scratch. Since the Grik weren’t much interested in keeping records, all it had ever taken to shift untold tons of material, supplies, new machinery, and labor all over the place to build artillery, munitions, and mighty fleets of ships and dirigibles, was a Japanese project supervisor’s word, or short note.

That such a large percentage of all that—in addition to what the “Jaaphs” overtly asked for—had quietly gone from the very beginning to Zanzibar would’ve come as a great surprise to First General Esshk and the Celestial Mother. Of course, Kurokawa had added even more to their hoard by intercepting every Grik ship and warrior sent to Madras to aid General Halik for the past several months, and without long-range communications, the Grik had no idea. The convoys had finally stopped, however, just a few weeks before, and that left him wondering whether the Grik had finally figured out what was happening—or if something else had occurred.

“Our new equipment and weapons *should* be better,” Lieutenant Iguri, Muriname’s Exec, agreed tightly. “But *enough* better? And largely manned by Grik who still think we aid their vile Celestial Mother!” He looked imploringly at Muriname. “And our pilots . . . !”

Kurokawa kept a placid face as he tamed another inner spike of fury at these men’s daring to question, or even discuss, his decisions. But he’d learned that the best way to keep and build their loyalty was to encourage them to invest themselves in his schemes. So long as they ultimately did what he wanted, he could control his anger and project an air of serene confidence. Let them dither and bicker all they wanted. He’d finally perfected the art of persuading men to believe he was wiser than they were yet truly respectful of their ideas. That way, even when he discarded their suggestions, they felt valued, as though they’d contributed and were involved.

“We must seek alliances,” Kurokawa declared. “Our power is great, but Lieutenant Iguri is correct: that’s largely due to the many Grik we control. The world is too large, and we are too few, to face it all alone,” he added with great solemnity. “These strangers do not threaten us—they can’t—but they might be of help.” He snorted. “And frankly, they have taunted us long enough with their cryptic messages and solicitations. It’s time we finally met.”

The discussion ended, as it should with such an absolute pronouncement, and the men stood beneath the broad pavilion on the jungle-bordered airstrip, silently sipping refreshments brought by Grik servants. The strip was one of three in the vicinity of the growing installation around what they still called Menai Bay, on the southwest coast of Zanzibar. The island retained its brilliant white beaches, but was considerably larger on this world and the interior jungle was remarkably dense. The airstrips had been difficult to construct, taking tremendous effort to clear and prepare, but “their” Grik troops had provided all the labor required. Responsible for controlling that labor—and the warriors performing it—were other officers, all former members of *Amagi*’s crew, promoted to lofty ranks. Many were present now, quietly conversing nearby in their surprisingly fine Grik-made “temperate white” uniforms. *That was another excellent stroke*, Kurokawa reflected, watching them. *Nice new uniforms—except for the painted-on rank*, he reminded himself, with a splash of annoyance. *But Grik embroidery is deplorable, and it’s the symbol that matters, after all. Even Amagi’s lowliest seamen have some rank now, and it makes no difference if they only outrank Grik. A little power is enough to “invest” them too—and make them want more.* He smiled.

Turning to Muriname, he waved at the long row of aircraft lining the north side of the runway, their dull paint shiny with dew under a brief beam of sunlight. “They are wonderful, General of the Sky! I never tire of looking at them! The lovely green color and glorious, undefiled *hinomaru*! You have outdone yourself.”

Muriname recognized the backhanded compliment. His first aircraft had been dirigibles—quite an achievement—but filled with hydrogen, they’d been very vulnerable in combat. He also knew Kurokawa hadn’t been pleased when he added Grik swords to the otherwise Japanese insignia on the big airships. He’d done it to inspire his Grik crews to think it symbolized *them*—and it worked. Over time, the modified rising sun flag had been embraced by all the Grik at sea and in the sky, and Kurokawa had grudgingly accepted it. Now, however, even the simple red disk was recognized by the Grik as their own (red had always

symbolized the Celestial Mother, after all), and Muriname had been more than happy to revert to it on his new aircraft.

“You have done well,” Kurokawa decreed.

“Thank you, Lord. I apologize that they were not ready sooner. Perhaps they might have . . .” He stopped, preferring not to remind Kurokawa that they hadn’t been available for the disastrous battles around Madras. A few had been complete, after more than a year of development, but large-scale production had been delayed by everything from problems with the radial engines, to the rubberlike material they needed for tires—from Madras. Commander Riku had certainly taken his time developing something to arm them with as well. “They’re monoplanes, of course,” Muriname continued, “but you can certainly see the fuselage shape of the Type Ninety-five floatplane we used as a pattern so extensively. I also incorporated many aspects of the Mitsubishi A Five M, Type Ninety-six, as best I could from memory, as I’m sure you’ve noticed. The elliptical wing and wheel pants, for instance. There is even a cowling for the engine, made of thinly rolled steel,” he added proudly.

“Indeed,” Kurokawa vaguely agreed. He cared little for the details of the planes, but was impressed by their existence—and Muriname’s enthusiasm. And of course the last comment reminded him of how far their steel-rolling capabilities had advanced, and that had countless applications. The planes were mostly wood and fabric, and he doubted they’d ever have aluminum. But they were doing wonderful things with the hoard of reasonably good steel he’d secretly sent from Madras. “You know,” he continued, “I had seen your sketches, and with their open cockpits and fixed landing gear, they look much like the new American planes. The first time I saw them, I thought you had surprised me with some of these!” His smile vanished. “Until they attacked.”

“I had already left Madras, on your orders, when the new American planes came,” Muriname reminded him. “I did not see them. From descriptions, however, I’m certain these will outperform them.”

“Even with Grik at the controls?” Kurokawa probed, and Muriname hesitated, looking hard at Iguri. His executive officer had been against teaching Grik to fly anything but the suicide bombs they dropped from the dirigibles to an almost insubordinate degree, but they’d finally managed to contrive a seating arrangement adapted to Grik physiology. They *crouched* inside the fuselage, strapped to a saddlelike seat, and operated rudder controls in the *back* of the cockpit. The stick and other controls remained unchanged. It was awkward, and aircraft so configured couldn’t be operated by humans, but it worked.

“The smarter ones fly well enough,” Muriname defended with another glance at Iguri. “And we can’t spare enough of our people from their industrial pursuits to form more than a core of pilots to build our squadrons around. I believe we have woefully misjudged the . . . intellectual potential of the Grik in the past. Only now, after the programs you initiated that allowed them to achieve mental as well as physical maturity, do we begin to see what they’re capable of.” He shrugged. “They make . . . adequate pilots, though they are, of course, difficult to train. And they have trouble with certain physical stresses of flight.” He brightened. “I suggest they will make excellent pilots for the twin-engine bomber I have proposed.”

“But you cannot assure me they will be a match for the enemy fighters in those.” Kurokawa waved at the planes.

“With our better machines, they should do well,” Muriname temporized, “and they will be more than a match for the enemy floatplanes that have plagued us so. And few as they are, our Japanese pilots will have no trouble with the American fighters, against human or Lemurian pilots.” He looked at Kurokawa and the other officers. “I . . . doubt we can compete with the enemy’s *modern* aircraft, their P-Forties, but they can’t have many of those and they won’t last long.”

“Very interesting. An honest assessment, as usual,” Kurokawa said, looking at the sky and calculating. “And I’m sure you’re right, General of the Sky,” he agreed, much to Muriname’s surprise and relief. “We have little to fear from the P-Forties. They proved decisive at Madras, but I cannot imagine how the enemy could ever get them here. I doubt they can be configured to land on the enemy carriers, so they must operate from airfields like this—and there is no such thing even remotely nearby.”

“How indeed.” Muriname paused, glancing back over his own row of planes. “To slightly change the subject, my lord: clearly, I’m quite proud of them, but . . . are you sure we should display our latest aircraft to these strangers we wait to meet? I understand you want to impress them, but should we not conceal our strengths? I doubt they will be so open with us.”

Kurokawa hesitated, absorbing the implied criticism with difficulty but granting Muriname’s point. He took a breath. “We will not show them everything, General of the Sky, but since they are *flying* here to meet us, we must demonstrate we are their equals—not mere supplicants. If they can fly as far as it seems they have, then we must show ourselves equally capable. At no point can we let them sense that we actually *need* them, and we must stress always how much they need us.”

Signal Lieutenant Fukui strode quickly under the pavilion from the radio shack nearby and braced to attention. “My lord!” he cried. “I received the expected request for a low-power, high-frequency transmission.”

“You sent it?”

“*Hai!*”

“As we suspected, they obviously have sophisticated radio direction-finding capabilities,” Muriname said. “And they must be quite close.” Almost immediately, they began to hear a dull rumble, and everyone, including the “tame” Grik servants, craned their necks to the sky. Shortly, a large shape appeared, circling in from the southwest, and Kurokawa nodded in satisfaction. The strangers were approaching over the harbor where his impressive fleet lay at anchor. Some of the ships, his “dreadnaughts,” had proven somewhat disappointing, but he’d been working hard to improve them and they were remarkably large; bigger than most “old world” battleships. The plane drew closer, and he recognized it as a three-engine transport of a style ubiquitous for a decade before the war back home. He couldn’t tell if it was the German or Italian version, a J-U . . . something or other, or . . . whatever the other one was. They looked so much alike, and it didn’t really matter. He’d find out soon, no doubt.

It began to drizzle as the big low-wing trimotor circled the airfield, then swept almost gracefully down toward the strip. Kurokawa saw the corrugated metal skin, and the designation “Ju-52” suddenly popped into his mind. *German, then*, he mused. The markings were Italian, though—at least he thought so—and other, unfamiliar markings had been added. The paint scheme was a brown-and-tan camouflage pattern, and he wondered if that was a clue to their source. *Impossible to say. If they are Italian, they could be from somewhere in Italian East Africa—or as far as Italy itself. A long distance, either way.* The latter was farther than the plane could fly without refueling, he realized, and the former was impossible—wasn’t it? According to his understanding of Grik holdings in Africa, Arabia, and until recently, India, Italians *couldn’t be* in East Africa without First General Eshk knowing about it . . . could they? And if Eshk had known . . . The trimotor touched down, bounced, then settled as it lost speed. Kurokawa hadn’t allowed for an ostentatious greeting ceremony, but the pavilion full of officers had drawn the pilot’s attention and the plane taxied back in its direction. He noted with annoyance that the plane, far heavier than anything the airstrip had been designed for, was leaving ruts that would have to be leveled.

The drizzle increased and became a typical afternoon deluge. For a while, the plane just sat there with muddy

grass on its wheels, the engines winding down to a stop, and the exhaust stacks ticking and hissing, while the Japanese remained under cover. Kurokawa actually chuckled, a sound that drew several concerned looks. *Let them fret*, he thought. *It really is rather funny. Neither of us is willing to go to the other in the rain.*

Eventually the torrent eased, and a large cargo door opened in the plane's fuselage. A ladderlike step arrangement unfolded from inside, and four men stepped down on the wet, prickly grass. Kurokawa noted they all wore similar dress—rather faded, yellowish tan bush jackets and darker trousers—but a few differences were striking. Three of the men wore tall boots, but two wore brown and one wore black. The fourth man had scuffed shoes and puttees. All wore pistol belts, but these were different colors too. Most unusual of all, each man wore a distinctly different hat, from overseas caps to pith helmets—which also struck Kurokawa as rather amusing. His amusement didn't last, however, when he saw that the visitors were not gaping around with curiosity or interest; they were very calmly, intently, watching him. *Waiting.*

He glanced at the sky. The rain had passed, evolving into a heavy haze of moisture-laden air. "Well, let us see what we have here," he said, suddenly nervously furious enough to let his voice ring harshly. He stepped forward, followed by his immediate staff. Only then did the visitors move forward as well. Two other men, apparently pilots, appeared in the door of the plane but didn't step down. Instead, they merely sat, their feet dangling in the air. *Even they wear different hats!* Kurokawa told himself, attempting to lighten his mood. It didn't work. When they drew within a few feet, the visitors finally saluted. With some hesitation, Kurokawa returned the gesture, followed by his officers.

"Ah," said the tallest of the four strangers. He wore a round-topped hat with a patent leather brim and displayed a thin mustache. "You must be Monsieur Kuro. . . ." He paused and smiled apologetically. "Monsieur 'General of the Sea' Kurokawa! It is an honor to meet you in person at last. It is I, Capitaine de Fregate Victor Gravois, who has been responsible for contacting you in the past!"

"I am he," Kurokawa answered in the same English the visitor used. *They already know so much about us, including who—and where!—we are, which is disconcerting enough, but how does he know my name, my title, and that I speak English?* His mind raced.

"Excellent! Then please allow me to present my colleagues." The man gestured at the thin, dark-haired man beside him. "This is Maggiore Antonio Rizzo, of the Italian Aeronautica Militaire. No doubt he will find your aircraft interesting, should you care to let him see them more closely."

"It would be my great pleasure to examine them," Rizzo said, also in English.

"I am Commandante Fidel Morrillo," said an equally thin man with blond hair, not waiting to be introduced, "and I have the honor to serve the Spanish Nationalist Army."

Kurokawa nodded at him, blinking surprise.

"And this," Gravois added smoothly, indicating the fourth and youngest man standing, "is Aspirant Gilles Babin, my aide. Maggiore Rizzo's aide, Teniente de Luca, is one of our pilots"—he frowned, glancing back—"as is the representative of our German allies, Oberleutnant Fiedler," he added almost dismissively.

Kurokawa's racing mind sped up. Here were Frenchmen, Italians, a Spaniard, and a German, who'd all arrived in a German-made plane, all together and apparently friendly despite the obvious undertones of tension. Additionally, the Frenchman seemed to lead the delegation; its German representative had merely waved, somewhat sullenly, when he was named. Most bizarre. "You are welcome, gentlemen," he managed, and named his staff. When that was complete, he invited them under the pavilion for refreshments, and to avoid the rain that had fitfully resumed. Kurokawa was interested to see that the strangers were not surprised,

or even overly nervous about the Grik servants. Obviously, they not only knew about Grik, but they also knew they could be “domesticated.” Conversation was light but increasingly frustrating. The flight had been “long and uncomfortable,” but there was no mention of its origin. The climate was “wetter here” than what the visitors were accustomed to. The nectar the Grik servants brought had a most “vigorous” flavor.

Never one for small talk, or much of anyone’s talk but his own, Kurokawa felt his neck grow increasingly hot. Finally, he could help himself no longer. “I’ve long been extremely curious,” he said, “ever since we received your first transmission. . . .” He paused, clasping his hands behind his back, and then blurted, “Just who and what are you, Captain Gravois?”

Gravois dabbed at his mustache with one of the handkerchiefs that seemed to be in such abundance. “To business so soon? I had thought we might take a little longer to simply enjoy the wonder of meeting new friends on this outlandish, savage world. No?” He sighed. “Who I am, I have told you, General of the Sea Kurokawa. It is I with whom you have communicated. My duty for the service I represent is that of . . . let us say ‘analysis.’” He smiled. “And now envoy as well!”

“But . . . you apparently know a great deal about us—about *me*,” Kurokawa said, heroically masking his growing rage and frustration. “Yet we know virtually nothing about you!”

“All in good time! We will tell you everything you wish to know, within reason, of course. To exchange information and establish friendly relations is why we came, after all. At present, I will simply say that my colleagues and I represent several . . . powers that have joined together for our mutual benefit and protection. I won’t go into the background of it all just now, as you may find it extraordinarily confusing, but you may call us the ‘League of Tripoli.’ From that you may even deduce our origins on this world. . . .” Gravois smiled engagingly. “Or perhaps not. It matters little to you now in any event, and no doubt you are familiar with the circumstances of our arrival, having endured the same yourself—as all *real* people have. But our time here has been somewhat longer than yours, and slightly less contentious in some respects, allowing greater leisure to consolidate, grow, and begin looking around for friends—and enemies.”

“You have enemies?”

“Of course! As well as friends. We always seek new friends.”

“You are obviously aware that I—that *we*—have enemies,” Kurokawa ground out. “Perhaps you have also seen how well I have prepared to face them again?”

“Impressive ships,” Rizzo said, addressing Kurokawa for the first time since their initial exchange. “But how capable? Capitaine Gravois is a better judge of that than I, no doubt. Your new aircraft, on the other hand, appear a great improvement over your last attempts—though even dirigibles have their place.” His last words sounded speculative.

Kurokawa could no longer hide his fury. “How *can* you know so much! How can you be so dismissive of my power, through a few short transmissions—and perhaps what you might have monitored. You cannot have known the things—the dirigibles, where we are, my *name*”—he stopped, staring directly at Gravois—“unless you have *spied* on us!”

“I have not spied, General of the Sea,” the Frenchman stated soothingly, “but the League has eyes in as many places as it can put them. We must protect ourselves, as I have said. I merely analyze the information brought to me, about you, the Grik, others you do not know, and your primary enemies, of course. It is they and the Grik that make us most interested in you, as it turns out.” He looked around, finding a chair. “May I sit?” Kurokawa nodded sharply and found a seat himself. Gravois sighed when he was settled. “Allow me to

briefly summarize your situation, as I see it. Feel free to correct me at any point if I am mistaken. When I am done, I will go into more detail about the League.”

“Very well.”

Gravois sipped his nectar and smiled. “*Bon*. Now, where to begin? Ah. Your Imperial Japan was principally at war with the British, American, and Russian empires—”

“Not the Soviets!” Kurokawa pounced.

“Soviets?”

“The Russians, as you call them.”

Gravois glanced at his colleagues, but the smile never left his face. “Indeed,” he said, “such a major difference so quickly,” he added cryptically.

“And proof you do not know everything!” Kurokawa almost gloated.

“And perhaps proof that there is a great deal about the nature of the event that brought us all here that *you* do not yet know, Monsieur Kurokawa,” Gravois countered. “May I continue?”

Angry, but confused, Kurokawa nodded.

“You were at war with . . . some of the same powers that we were in conflict with,” Gravois stressed. “And when you arrived here with your mighty battle cruiser, you allied yourself with the reptile folk. Entirely understandable, in your situation.” He waved expansively. “And you have done amazingly well, considering what you had to start with. I commend you! The League commends you! Unfortunately, you have suffered a series of . . . misfortunes, that not only cost you your excellent ship and a majority of your crew, but a rather impressive fleet—and several armies of reptiles as well.” He gestured around again. “You have rebuilt with astonishing speed and resourcefulness but have apparently withdrawn from your alliance with the reptiles and contracted into what is, of necessity, a principally defensive posture. What is more, your primary enemy, this ‘American’-led alliance—of more powers than you might perhaps be aware—not only remains on the march, but has likely conquered the very capital of your former reptilian allies on Madagascar by now!”

“That’s impossible!” Iguri blurted, and Kurokawa glared at him.

“Quite possible, I assure you,” Gravois countered. “Even probable, given the transmissions we have monitored and certain . . . observations that were made, regarding the course of one of their fleets.” He arched his eyebrows. “That, and the fact that apparently a major battle was fought, and we are still intercepting transmissions from that direction. Most are in code, of course,” he said, waving the fact aside, “but we can deduce enough to be relatively sure that the action was at least partially successful for your enemies.”

“Observations? Deductions?” Kurokawa demanded.

Gravois shrugged. “We were . . . observing with a submarine,” he confessed, “that we have since lost contact with. I fear it may have run afoul of one of the monstrous fishes in this terrible sea.” He cocked his head and smiled. “I don’t suppose it has turned up here?”

They lost a submarine and treat it like a minor inconvenience—or is that just what they want me to think? “It did not. And if it was tracking a fleet under his protection, I consider it most likely of all that Captain Reddy

sank it with his tiny destroyer!” Kurokawa almost gloated again. *What’s the matter with me? Why should I antagonize these people? And I certainly should not relish any success achieved by my most mortal foe!*

Gravois glanced at Rizzo, then back. “That is a distinct possibility. The commander of the submarine had orders not to interfere with the Allied fleet unless he was certain it was in a position to threaten the reptile capital directly, and even then he was only authorized to . . . discourage it. Perhaps sink something important.” He sighed. “The ‘little destroyer,’ as you call it, may indeed have destroyed our vessel. My analysis of Captain Reddy has painted him—and his people—as disconcertingly capable, and his ship was reported to be the primary escort of the Allied fleet.” He sipped again.

“But . . . why should you want to ‘discourage’ Captain Reddy and protect the Grik capital? Are you allied with them?” Kurokawa demanded at last, voicing his chief concern that had been building as the discussion progressed. These people *could* have come from Italian East Africa, and General Esshk probably *would* have kept them secret from him if he could, particularly after their falling-out over Kurokawa’s insistence that Regent Tsalka be destroyed. . . .

Gravois and Rizzo both laughed, and even Commandante Morrillo managed a sour smile.

“No, not at all. But . . . they have been allies of *yours*, have they not?” Gravois finally frowned. “The reptiles, the ‘Grik’ as you call them, are savages. You have done well to arm them enough to assist you, but not well enough to surpass you. With additional sophistication added to their numbers, they could become a threat even to the League.” Rizzo leaned forward. “As could the Americans and their strange allies,” he assured fervently, “perhaps even more quickly.”

Kurokawa shook his head. “This is maddening. You contacted *me* with an offer of ‘assistance,’ yet the greatest assistance you could’ve given would have been to destroy Captain Reddy and his ship. You did not. You lost a valuable submarine ‘protecting’ the Grik—whom you do not want to win this war—from a ‘more dangerous power,’ which you do not want to attack unless they threaten the Grik! It makes no sense!”

“It makes perfect sense from our perspective, señor,” Morrillo said, as impatient with Gravois as Kurokawa. “From all we’ve learned, the League of Tripoli is the greatest single power on this planet. And we have . . . considerable forces at our disposal. We even have aircraft, as you can see. We have been here longer than you, but what we still need most of all is time—time to build a lasting civilization of not only people, but the *right kind* of people, on this world. We cannot get directly involved here at present because we have other commitments—and frankly it is quite far. What we do *not* want is for the Americans and their . . . animal minions to gain supremacy in this part of the world. Nor do we want the reptiles to do so. That is in our own self-interest.”

“What is also in our interest, is your survival, General of the Sea Kurokawa,” Rizzo assured. “That you and your people not only survive, but thrive—and ultimately dominate this region—the entire world!—hand in hand with the League of Tripoli!” Rizzo glanced at Gravois, then leaned forward again, earnest. “There are . . . differences you will learn about, between the worlds we came from, your people and ours, but most of us were fighting the same war, for the same reasons. We were on the same side there, and should be here. We do not want the Americans or the Grik to win out here. We want *you* to win, and we will do what we can to help!”

“Different worlds?” Kurokawa almost shrieked. He wasn’t keeping up with this well at all, and he was furious to see Muriname nodding slightly as if he understood every word. He shook his head. “But if the enemy has taken Madagascar, he has won the war! Not only that, he is within striking distance of *me*!”

“Your enemy has *not* won the war, General of the Sea Kurokawa,” Gravois insisted. “And even if he’s taken

Madagascar, he will be amazingly lucky to keep it. Believe me, sir, we cannot possibly explain everything you want to know in one sitting—our greatest help to you for now will be information, after all—so may we adjourn to a more comfortable setting? Once there—and as your guests for some time, I should hope—we will address every question we are authorized to answer. During that time you will learn why it is in the League’s interest to aid you—in what small ways you might require—against our common foes.”

CHAPTER 2

///// “Grik City” Madagascar

USS Walker

August 22, 1944

The dreams were back. New ones. Bad ones. They differed from the ones that used to leave him anxious and sweating when he awoke, but those, in retrospect, weren’t quite as painful. They’d been less frequent and faded quickly from his mind. Moreover, he generally recovered from the . . . sense of them as the day wore on. These were worse, as far as Matthew Reddy was concerned, because they stayed with him even when he woke—and they were so real! It was as if his eyes had been motion-picture cameras at the time, and he saw the awful images again and again, projected on his closed lids when he slept—and in his mind’s eye just as clearly when he didn’t. He didn’t *dread* sleep; he had to have it and nobody got enough these days, but he’d quit sacking out on the cot in the charthouse behind the bridge. He didn’t know if the dreams made him shout. It would be bad enough if his officers heard him but possibly catastrophic if the replacement enlisted hands did. That left only the short, sweaty naps he managed in his cramped, sweltering stateroom, where he could relive alone that terrible day when they, or rather *he*, nearly lost it all—and he’d still lost a lot.

He slept soundly on the rare occasions he joined his wife, Sandra, aboard *Big Sal*; the dreams weren’t quite as bad then. Perhaps her touch, her mere proximity, took him to a more relaxed, less anxious state. He recognized that a recurring theme in the dreams was a sense of isolation, even abandonment. That was understandable. His old Asiatic Fleet “four-stacker” destroyer, USS *Walker* (DD-163), hadn’t just been separated from the rest of a reeling navy after Pearl Harbor, the Philippines, and the disastrous battle of the Java Sea; she’d been swept to an entirely different world. That was bad enough, but he’d come to grips with it. They’d made friends, forged alliances, and helped create the means to resist multiple foes even more implacable than the Japanese. But USS *Walker*, beat-up and rebuilt again and again, always found herself in the thick of the action—too often by herself. That was getting old, particularly after the last time, when she grounded on a sandbar in the harbor of the principal city of her most ferocious foe, the Grik. All alone she’d fought, the tide going out and wave upon wave of furry/feathery, reptilian Grik swarming against her side and eventually across her deck. That was what he dreamed about—the terrible, lonely, bloody chaos of it all.

By itself, that shouldn’t have really bothered him either, he thought. He was used to the sights, sounds, smells, and terror of desperate combat. What he wasn’t accustomed to was the utmost anguish and mounting horror of complete and final failure. Miraculously, they *hadn’t* failed, and in spite of everything, they’d clawed yet another victory from the literal jaws of defeat. But he couldn’t shake the *sense* of it—that their victory was only transitory. That anxious urgency, that . . . doubt . . . as well as a harsh, fresh grief over a very personal loss—was what nagged him now.

Sandra helped. Being with her and enjoying the wonder of the new life stirring in her womb distracted him. But in the aftermath of the battle for Grik City, those visits were rare. There was too much to do, to prepare for, and Sandra was just as busy with all the wounded that the battle had provided her medical corps. He sighed, shifting on his grass-stuffed mattress in the boxy bed frame in the dark. Soon, he’d lose even the relief Sandra gave him if all went right in the morning staff meeting, and he dreaded the argument to come.

He wanted her gone to protect her, of course, her and the child she carried. But he really had to get the wounded out of Grik City as well. They were too vulnerable and too many. He'd shamelessly appeal to her duty to them and their child, if he had to, and doubted even her legendary stubborn streak could overcome that combination. There'd be a fight, though . . . and he already missed her.

"Damn it," he muttered, sitting up and flinging the damp pillow away. The dream had killed his sleep, and his racing mind had left him too restless to even allow his tired muscles the recovery they deserved. He leaned forward so the meager circulation of the clattering fan could play across his sweaty face and neck. "I need a shrink," he snorted aloud.

Probably every ship's captain since the beginning of ships with crews has had to be an amateur shrink of some kind, he told himself. Making people do dangerous things or go places they'd never go if given an honest choice has probably always taken a lot of psychology. Particularly if the voyage ends in fighting a battle that nobody in his right mind would want any part of. He sighed again. *And we've been in the middle of a fight we never wanted, right up to our necks, for two and a half years. No leave, no downtime, hardly any real liberty . . . It's a wonder any of us is sane.*

He brushed back greasy hair with his fingers, doubting he'd ever deliberately engaged in manipulative shrinkery beyond what was required of any ship's captain in his situation. "Like that's ever happened," he snorted aloud, but quickly grew angry at his own self-pity. *Enough of that! What good does it do for the shrink to shrink his own head?*

He rubbed his eyes and looked around in the gloom. All he'd done was his duty, as he saw it, and that was all he expected of others. But he knew the main reason he felt abandoned and isolated. They, all of First Fleet South and its expeditionary force, were on the creaking end of a very long limb, surrounded by enemies and ridiculously outnumbered. Common sense declared they ought to pull out and regroup. The problem was, if they did that—simply surrendered Madagascar back to the Grik—everybody they'd lost taking the damn place would've died for nothing. Even worse, Matt honestly didn't believe they'd ever quit running once they started. His . . . analysis told him they'd reached a psychological, if not numerical tipping point in the war, at least against the Grik. They'd hammered them like they'd never been hammered before, and he knew in his gut that if they just kept slugging, kept smashing whatever the Grik sent at them here in their own backyard, they had to break eventually. Madagascar was only a tiny part of the Grik Empire, but it was the capital, as they reckoned such things. And after all the reversals the "invincible" Grik had suffered, even before they lost this place and their "Celestial Mother," they *had* to be getting brittle . . . didn't they? He closed his eyes. *As a nutty Captain Shrink, I know we're getting brittle. It's the tipping point, all right, and it can go either way.*

Flipping the light switch, he stood to face himself in the little mirror above the sink. He saw the stubble on his face and premature (he thought) silver spreading from his temples to infest the rest of his brown hair. Red rims around his green eyes bore eloquent testimony to his exhaustion. *Barely thirty-five, and I look old,* he lamented, preparing for the day. He knew instinctively that morning GQ was only moments away. His internal clock had become very precise over the last few years. He wet his face, lathered up with the odd-smelling Lemurian soap, and poised his razor. After all this time, he remained one of only a very few of his "original" destroyermen to stay clean shaven. The precedent was so well established by now that if he didn't shave himself, Juan Marcos, Matt's self-proclaimed "personal" steward, would clomp up to the bridge on his wooden leg and do it for him in his very own chair before the end of the watch. He didn't want that. Juan was still hurting after the fight—they all were—and he actually preferred shaving himself. He'd always believed he did it for the men, to show them that no matter how bad or downright weird things got, some things would remain unchanged. That continuity spanned all they'd been through, and in some ways even carried them back to the world they'd left and many loved on the China Station, in the "old navy" before the

war. Staring at his reflection and suddenly contemplating “shrinkery” once again, he wondered how long he’d been doing it more for himself than for anyone else.

The squalling, tortured goose of the general alarm sounded as he finished dressing and adjusting his hat on his head. He gritted his teeth. The alarm had been going downhill for a long time, having even been sunk once, after all, but now . . . it was becoming unbearable. He was going to have to talk to Spanky or Tabby, or *anybody* who could come up with a replacement. Honestly, with all the technical miracles they’d cooked up over the last few years, how hard could it be? He sincerely hoped the alarm wasn’t being retained for nostalgia or somebody’s amusement, because it really wasn’t funny anymore. He’d held off personally requesting that something be done, particularly with all the repairs *Walker* had needed after her latest fight, but he was just about ready to take that step.

With a final, skeptical glance in the mirror, he parted the green curtain and stepped quickly into the passageway leading to the companionway, aft. Mounting the steps, he emerged behind the bridge, near the main blower, and stopped before he was trampled by Lemurians—“Cats”—and men trotting past as they headed for their stations. Some of the replacements from other ships, still amazed they’d been chosen for *Walker*, saluted as they passed. Matt shook his head with a sad, hidden smile. It was rightly considered an honor to serve aboard his ship, but it had proven a death sentence for far too many. He paused at the base of the stairs to the bridge and gazed at the predawn spectacle surrounding the old destroyer.

Fires burned everywhere on land, flickering as thick as the sparks that rose above them. They were cookfires for the army, mostly, stirring to the sounds of urgent whistles and drums. A few pyres still burned for the grievously wounded who fell away each day, but those had fortunately diminished. The combined human-Lemurian army occupying Grik City was camped under tents despite the practical shelter that already existed. None could bear to occupy the filthy abodes of their enemy, and they’d been razing the whole place to the ground in any event, using the material it provided to further fortify the city. The only structures left alone were the docks and adjacent warehouses—and the enormous Celestial Palace itself, of course.

The palace was stunning in size, if not architecture. It really did look like a “giant cowflop,” as Dennis Silva had described it, though others had said it resembled a “squashed pyramid,” since it did kind of have four rather rounded and indistinct corners. Courtney Bradford said it was as big as the Great Pyramid at Giza—even if it did indeed appear a “trifle compressed from the top.” It was just as durably built as the Great Pyramids too, constructed of enormous blue-black granite stones that Courtney insisted were indigenous to the island, though they hadn’t seen any nearby. Like the massive, ancient wall of rot-resistant Galla trees that stretched for miles and ringed the city like a sharp-peaked range of mountains to keep the wilds of Madagascar at bay, the palace, however hideous, had not been easy to build. Cleaned and brightened inside by knocking out sufficient blocks to provide light and ventilation, the various levels had become a hospital—and might serve fairly well as a fortress once they emplaced sufficient numbers of the big Grik guns (disconcertingly better than they’d seen before) that they’d found in the warehouses.

Matt looked out at the harbor beyond where his ship was docked and saw the dark shapes of First Fleet South moored beyond the protruding wreckage of Grik “dreadnaughts.” USNRS *Salissa* (CV-1), was closest, and the largest ship in view. Once a vast, seagoing, sail-driven “Home” for thousands of Lemurians, she’d been converted to the first steam-powered aircraft carrier/tender this world had ever seen. Others followed, and there was a whole new class of purpose-built carriers entering the war. But their deployment was slowed by the necessary training of pilots for their planes at the Army and Naval Air Corps Training Center at Kaufman Field in Baalkpan. Other pilots were trained in Maa-ni-la, but they were all sent east to fight the so-called Holy Dominion.

Beyond *Big Sal* was SMS *Amerika*, a large ocean liner turned auxiliary cruiser from a very slightly different

world than even *Walker* left behind. There were still a lot of theories flying around about that, but it was mostly just an intellectual exercise at this point. Where exactly all the various allies who'd joined together on this world came from didn't much matter anymore—or yet—to anyone but Courtney Bradford, who was the source of most of the theories in the first place. Other ships, still darkened for the night, lay at anchor; they were troopships, supply ships, oilers, all both wind and steam powered, as were the frigates (DDs) of Des-Ron 6, patrolling beyond the harbor. Closer in, the four operable PT boats that remained of MTB-Ron 1 took turns scouting the harbor mouth itself, and particularly the deep-water channel. One mystery submarine had cost them the self-propelled dry dock (SPD) *Respite Island*, and they'd remain on the alert for more, however unlikely more might be.

To the northwest, on a narrow finger of land, more fires burned. Matt shuddered at the thought of their purpose. After the battle, all the Grik that fled the city had wound up there, cut off, and unable or unwilling to continue the fight. Very un-Grik-like behavior. It was possible they'd "fallen prey," after experiencing a condition Bradford referred to as "Grik Rout," but if that was the case, they'd all be dead by now, after an orgy of mindless slaughter. That hadn't happened. They were trapped, and a good-size chunk of II Corps was keeping them that way, but they didn't madly attack, slay one another, or simply leap into the sea. They just sat there. They were *eating* one another, to be sure. That alone was "normal" for starving Grik, but otherwise they seemed prepared to simply . . . wait.

Matt grimaced and stepped into the pilothouse.

"Cap-i-taan on the bridge!" "Minnie" the talker cried in her squeaky voice.

"As you were," Matt said as 'Cats slammed to attention. The only other human there was his exec, Brad "Spanky" McFarlane. He was a short, skinny guy who kept his reddish hair and beard close-cropped. He had a big personality, though, and everyone who met him always remembered him bigger as well. He alone remained relaxed, sitting in Matt's chair, certain Matt would wave him down if he tried to stand. He would have too; Spanky was still on crutches.

"All stations manned and ready, Skipper," Spanky reported. "Extra lookouts are posted, steam's up in numbers three and four, secondary batteries and the dual-purpose four-inch-fifty aft are standing by for air action."

"Very well, Mr. McFarlane."

A few Grik zeppelins had been spotted over the last several days, obviously scouting the situation in the fallen capital. The first came as a big surprise and got away scot-free. The others were quickly shot down by P-1 Mosquito Hawks (better known as "Fleashooters") from *Big Sal*'s 1st Air Wing. The pursuit squadrons of the wing were all flying out of a Grik airship base east of the Celestial Palace, and that was where Captain Jis-Tikkar (Tikker), who was *Big Sal*'s Commander of Flight Operations, or "COFO," kept his HQ. Tikker's pilots made short work of the zeps he'd been warned about by the screening DDs, but based on how many dirigibles the Grik had thrown at them during the campaign for Indiaa, they all expected there'd be a *lot* more around here.

"All hands will remain at battle stations until the forenoon watch, then set condition three." Matt looked at his watch, again thankful the poor thing had survived so much. "I've got time for coffee, but then I've got an early staff meeting aboard *Big Sal*."

Spanky turned in the chair. "Pass the word for coffee." He grinned. "But tell Juan to *send* it up. We ain't got all day."

A bosun's pipe squealed down on the fo'c'sle, calling the boatswain's mates to report, and Matt stiffened.

"Chief Jeek," Spanky explained softly. Already a bosun's mate, Jeek had been chief of *Walker's* Special Air Division, handling the lone PB-1B "Nancy" observation floatplane she carried. Now he was chief of the starboard division and in line to succeed Chief Bosun Fitzhugh Gray. Nobody, Jeek in particular, thought he could ever *replace* Gray. The Chief Bosun of the Navy, or "Super Bosun" as he'd been called, had been a font of wisdom and an irresistible force of nature. Now he was dead, and his loss left far more than an empty slot that needed filling. He'd been like a father to Matt and many others in various important ways, and his death had torn a hole in Captain Reddy's—and by extension, *Walker's*—heart. "Only the second or third 'Cat I ever heard learn to blow one o' those things," Spanky continued mildly. "Don't know how he does it, with his lips split like that." He paused, gauging Matt's reaction. "He'll make a good bosun."

"Sure."

Spanky nodded uncomfortably, then snorted. "Gives me the creeps, though. There's no doubt who his role model was, and I nearly jumped outta my skin the first time I heard him!"

"Best role model in the Navy," Matt said simply, and Spanky nodded.

"You said it, Skipper."

Lieutenant Tab-At, *Walker's* engineering officer, chose that moment to storm into the pilothouse. She'd clearly been aiming for Spanky but hesitated when she saw Matt. He waved her forward. "Beg to report," she practically hissed behind sharp, clenched teeth. Her gray-furred ears were back, and her eyes flashed behind furiously blinking lids like an enraged Morse lamp. Her tail swished so rapidly from side to side beneath her kilt that it was almost a blur.

"Spit it out, Tabby," Spanky invited gruffly, hoping her anger wasn't directed at him. He loved Tabby like a daughter—mostly—but her feelings for him were more . . . straightforward. That could be a strain on both of them at times.

"That . . . idiot *mouse* is still not reported aboard!" she seethed. Matt saw Spanky's relief and knew what he was thinking: *All is well. Tabby's mad at Isak Reuben, not me.*

"Chief Reuben was wounded in the fighting for the Celestial Palace," Matt pointed out. He didn't add that the squirrely little guy was a genuine hero—again—having actually killed the Grik Celestial Mother himself. Granted, he'd done it by default, being the last one able after the rest of the party had fallen wounded or dead along the way. Even the mighty Dennis Silva had lost too much blood to reach the objective. Of the three who did, Irvin Laumer had been killed, and Lawrence, Silva's Grik-like Sa'aaran friend, had been too hurt to raise a weapon. That left Isak.

"He ain't hurt," Tabby countered, slipping further from the English-Lemurian patois that had evolved in the Navy, and much of the Allied military in general. That happened to a lot of 'Cats when they were mad. "Just little skaatches," she continued darkly. "He been m'lingerin' all this time, while there so much repairs!"

Matt did find it odd that Isak hadn't returned to his precious boilers as fast as he could. Maybe he was using his new hero status to push more of the vile cigarettes he and his half brother, Gilbert Yeager, (and a Baalkpan 'Cat named Pepper) had "perfected" from the awful tobacco indigenous to Java. He'd met only limited success with that, since the things were still pretty revolting, and most who used the waxy, yellowish weed—human or Lemurian—preferred to chew it, flavored with a kind of molasses. "What repairs are left, before the ship's ready to get underway?" Matt asked. Tabby looked at him and blinked, distracted from her

rant.

“We get underway immediately, Cap-i-taan,” she assured him. “The holes are patched, and the ship’s not leaking much more than usual. EMs’re still wiring in the new main junction box in the aft engine room, but the generator overhaul’s done.” She made a very human shrug. “There’s still a lotta topside damage, and Mr. Saan-di-son says the port torpedo mount might not get fixed. It’s shot full’a holes. Maybe we get tubes four an’ six working, but number two’s a sieve.”

“If everything’s shipshape, what do you need that little creep Isak for?” Spanky asked, genuinely curious.

“Cause he *b’longs* here,” Tabby stated simply, as if that explained everything. Spanky looked at Matt and arched his eyebrows.

“Okay,” Matt told Tabby. “Give Bernie all the help on the tubes you can spare. I really *like* having torpedoes.” He paused, considering. “And go ahead and round up anybody in the hospital that the docs will cut loose, including Chief Reuben.” He looked at Spanky. “*Walker* may need to get underway soon, and you might have to take her out—if you feel up to it.”

Spanky nodded. “Just say the word. I’m a little gimpy, but how much running do I need to do?” He smiled strangely. “I kind of saw this coming, you know. After you came down on Adar about our little fiasco”—he waved at the brightening bay—“and how he needs to stick to the big picture. I figured you’d have to take more of the planning load on land as well as sea.” He grinned. “Put some of that Academy history degree to work!”

Matt smiled self-consciously. “I hope not, Spanky. I think I proved at Aryaal that I’m not much good at planning big battles on land. But just as I reminded Adar that he’s chairman of the Grand Alliance—and this new nation they’ve cooked up—I’m still commander of all Allied forces, not just the Navy. General Safir Maraan’s a great leader and a wildcat in a fight, but she’s also proven she can be a bit . . . impulsive.” He considered. “She’s had time to think about things, and I’ll see how she is at the meeting. Worst case, I’ll hang around to keep an eye on things until Generals Alden and Rolak get here from Madras.” Both of them knew he’d hate that, and they hoped it wouldn’t be necessary.

A Lemurian mess attendant finally arrived with the coffeepot, but Matt waved it away. “I’d better get going,” he said, glancing at his watch again. “Better coffee on *Big Sal* anyway,” he added softly, for Spanky alone.

Chief Jeek and a hastily assembled side party piped Matt over the side, bringing Chief Gray—and the dream he died in—firmly back to mind, and Matt strode quickly down the dock to the waiting motor launch with a grim expression on his face. The morning sky was bright and clear, but a stiff breeze had sprung up, making him clutch his hat to his head. The launch took him, swaying and burbling on the choppy water, out to *Big Sal*. Ordinary whistles piped him aboard after he ascended the long stairway up the great ship’s side to the hangar deck above.

“Captain Reddy, good morning, sir!” greeted Commander “Sandy” Newman, *Salissa*’s executive officer. Matt managed a smile. Newman had been a Seaman 2nd on *Walker* when he came to this world, but was assigned here because he’d spent the better part of an enlistment aboard the *Lexington*. That made him one of their few “experts” on carriers. *The few who’ve survived, from Walker, Mahan, and S-19, have done okay for themselves*, Matt told himself with a jolt of bitter sarcasm he immediately regretted.

“Morning, Commander. Is the gang all here?”

“Mostly, sir. If you’ll follow me?”

There was quite a spread laid out for breakfast in “Ahd-mi-raal” Keje-Fris-Ar’s expansive quarters. The space wasn’t nearly as large as his old “Great Hall,” which would’ve been sufficient for a basketball game, but it was still bigger than any flag officer’s quarters Matt had ever seen. The common area alone was bigger than the wardroom on a battleship. Back when the bear-shaped, rust-furred Lemurian shared simple breakfasts of akka egg with Adar and USNRS *Salissa* (CV-1) had been merely one of many monstrous “Homes” that remained almost perpetually at sea, they’d usually eaten alone at a small rickety table. Now nearly every meal was an event, accompanied by a strategy session around a massive, ornately carved table that would comfortably seat two dozen. And the gray-furred Adar was no longer High Sky Priest for *Salissa* alone, but of Baalkpan as well. Even more important to most individuals other than himself, he was also chairman of the Grand Alliance—or whatever the Alliance was becoming in his absence—and High Chief of Baalkpan itself.

Adar sat at the head of the table, and Matt was ushered to a seat across from Keje. The two exchanged grins, but Matt’s was a little forced. He was disappointed that Sandra wasn’t there. He understood her absence, but he missed her very much. Soon, he’d miss her even more if he got his way, he realized once again. *Probably just as well she’s not here to argue*, he thought with a twinge of shame. He glanced at Adar and noted the chairman’s reserved blinking. Adar was still uncomfortable about the . . . discussion they’d had after the battle for Grik City, when Matt pointedly accused that Adar’s operational meddling had probably cost a lot of extra lives. Matt still wasn’t entirely sure, but he believed Adar had taken the criticism to heart in a healthy way. He’d definitely taken great pains to make sure they were “all on the same page,” ever since, and that was something.

The same ‘Cat steward who took Matt’s hat returned immediately with a cup of coffee. It still wasn’t “right,” but it was infinitely better than what Juan brewed. Other stewards brought food, and conversation dwindled as they ate. It was the Lemurian way not to discuss serious matters over a meal, and Matt heartily approved. Instead of talking, he concentrated on eating—and observing his companions. Lieutenant Colonel Chack-Sab-At sat with his betrothed, General Queen Safir Maraen. *Still betrothed?* Matt wondered, *or have they finally tied the knot?* Lemurian mating customs remained mysterious to him and varied considerably from one clan or Home to another. Chack, his blue Marine tunic and kilt over brindled fur contrasting with the white of most of the naval officers, was originally from *Big Sal* herself, though he considered *Walker* his true home now. He’d grown up in a society where mating was highly structured as to who could mate with whom, but otherwise amazingly informal. Essentially, weddings were consummated by . . . being consummated, as far as Matt could tell. Safir, with her black fur and silver eyes—and silver-washed cuirass—was from B’mbaado, where things were different. There’d been a genuine aristocracy there, and while the actual ceremony remained quite simple, her wedding would traditionally have been accompanied by a significant celebration.

Matt shook his head and smiled when he caught their eyes. They’d both been through so much, changed so much—as had all Lemurians everywhere in the course of this terrible war. Age-old customs and beliefs had been subverted or outright destroyed by the breakneck industrialization and mobilization of massive armies from previously isolated, insular Homes—and even species! The unavoidable comingling of cultures that accompanied it all had begun the process of creating a new, blended culture, just as surely as Commander Alan Letts was overseeing the creation of a new united nation at his “constitutional congress” in Baalkpan. Who knew how it would all sort out? Everyone, likely including Chack and Safir, was making it up as he went. In spite of everything, Matt had a growing confidence that, with people like Chack and Safir as role models, whatever society emerged from the war—if they could only win it—would make the nation Alan was building a *good* place to live.

Matt’s gaze swept other faces. There was Major Jindal of the 1st “Chack’s” Raider Brigade, substituting for Chack’s Exec (and sister), Risa. He often unofficially represented the human troops of the Empire of the

New Britain Isles at these meetings. (Brevet) Lieutenant Colonel Saachic, from the Filpin Lands, was seated beyond Safir. He commanded the me-naak mounted cavalry in her II Corps, and had come as her aide. Down the table, COFO Jis-Tikkar (Tikker) ate heartily. The highly polished 7.7-millimeter cartridge case thrust through a hole in his sable-furred ear glinted under the “wondrous” incandescent bulbs dangling in their fixtures overhead. Matt caught Captain Jarrik-Fas, of USS *Tassat*, looking at him, blinking amusement, while he spoke to an Imperial Marine leaning near. He wondered what that was about. Jarrik was one of Keje’s many cousins and looked a lot like him. He had a broader mischievous streak, however, and when Matt blinked questioningly back in the Lemurian fashion, Jarrik merely grinned toothily and the Marine stepped back. At the far end of the table was Kapitan Leutnant Becher Lange of SMS *Amerika*. His superior, Kapitan Von Melhausen, had no desire to leave his ship. He was an old man whose mind tended to wander at the worst possible times. He’d come to realize this himself and had made Lange master of *Amerika*, for all intents and purposes. Across from him sat Commander Simon Herring, the head of Strategic Intelligence. Of all those present, Matt still had the most difficulty figuring him out. Like a number of others now linked to the Allied cause, Herring had come to this world aboard a Japanese prison ship, and if he hadn’t already been paranoid, his experiences at the hands of the Japanese had made him so. He’d made great strides since his bombastic, even somewhat subversive arrival and had since become a “real” Navy man. He’d also acquitted himself well in the fighting for the palace. After a bumpy start, he seemed to have come around to Matt’s way of thinking in many ways, and had become a true believer in the cause of defeating the Grik. The paranoia—and a few secrets, Matt was sure—still lurked, but that was probably normal and appropriate for a snoop.

There were other officers—the table was full—but Matt caught himself staring at Ensign Nathaniel Hardee. He was a young man—a teenager, really—who ate woodenly and had the uncomfortable look of someone with no idea why he was there. Matt *thought* the young Englishman, “evacuated” to this world from Java aboard the now permanently lost *S-19*, had achieved the advanced age of sixteen. Like the slightly older Abel Cook, who’d arrived the same way, Hardee had grown up fast. He’d actually succeeded Lieutenant Irvin Laumer in command of PT-7, after that fine but troubled officer was killed trying to reach the Grik Celestial Mother. Hardee probably didn’t expect to keep the “Seven boat,” and even if he did, he had to be wondering why the master of one of the smallest craft the Alliance considered a warship had been summoned here.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Stephen Louis:

Have you spare time for a day? What do you do when you have far more or little spare time? Yeah, you can choose the suitable activity regarding spend your time. Any person spent all their spare time to take a walk, shopping, or went to the particular Mall. How about open or maybe read a book titled Straits of Hell (Destroyermen)? Maybe it is to get best activity for you. You understand beside you can spend your time along with your favorite's book, you can smarter than before. Do you agree with its opinion or you have additional opinion?

Roberta Swinton:

This Straits of Hell (Destroyermen) book is simply not ordinary book, you have after that it the world is in your hands. The benefit you receive by reading this book will be information inside this book incredible fresh, you will get facts which is getting deeper anyone read a lot of information you will get. That Straits of

Hell (Destroyermen) without we recognize teach the one who reading through it become critical in considering and analyzing. Don't be worry Straits of Hell (Destroyermen) can bring when you are and not make your handbag space or bookshelves' grow to be full because you can have it with your lovely laptop even phone. This Straits of Hell (Destroyermen) having excellent arrangement in word along with layout, so you will not really feel uninterested in reading.

Joseph Robison:

Does one one of the book lovers? If yes, do you ever feeling doubt while you are in the book store? Attempt to pick one book that you find out the inside because don't ascertain book by its handle may doesn't work this is difficult job because you are afraid that the inside maybe not as fantastic as in the outside search likes. Maybe you answer can be Straits of Hell (Destroyermen) why because the fantastic cover that make you consider with regards to the content will not disappoint you. The inside or content is actually fantastic as the outside or even cover. Your reading sixth sense will directly guide you to pick up this book.

Tim Gonzalez:

Is it an individual who having spare time in that case spend it whole day simply by watching television programs or just laying on the bed? Do you need something new? This Straits of Hell (Destroyermen) can be the response, oh how comes? A book you know. You are so out of date, spending your free time by reading in this brand-new era is common not a nerd activity. So what these ebooks have than the others?

**Download and Read Online Straits of Hell (Destroyermen) By
Taylor Anderson #8QYI0BF34OT**

Read Straits of Hell (Destroyermen) By Taylor Anderson for online ebook

Straits of Hell (Destroyermen) By Taylor Anderson Free PDF d0wnl0ad, audio books, books to read, good books to read, cheap books, good books, online books, books online, book reviews epub, read books online, books to read online, online library, greatbooks to read, PDF best books to read, top books to read Straits of Hell (Destroyermen) By Taylor Anderson books to read online.

Online Straits of Hell (Destroyermen) By Taylor Anderson ebook PDF download

Straits of Hell (Destroyermen) By Taylor Anderson Doc

Straits of Hell (Destroyermen) By Taylor Anderson Mobipocket

Straits of Hell (Destroyermen) By Taylor Anderson EPub

8QYI0BF34OT: Straits of Hell (Destroyermen) By Taylor Anderson