

Chapter One, Zosimos

Story told in the present moment by King Zosimos.

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“You guys might find it morbid,” I say to Terrence and Habin, back here in my palace living room. “I laid beside her and talked to her for several minutes before leaving.”

Terrence and Habin are expressionless as they sit like two schoolboys listening to me recalling the story of Visákhá’s death three months ago. I watch their eyes and facial expressions as I realize they don’t understand murder or any acts born out of anger. Our population hasn’t experienced anger for over twelve generations when you include the first four generations on the spacecraft that brought our forefathers here. Even when Terrence slugged that kid in school, he wouldn’t have done that act of rage without me first telling him to.

‘A population of complacency and mediocrity surrounds me.’

A planet of people who can’t think their way out of the city bathhouse, much less save themselves from an existential crisis. They all think they’re smart with all the science they’ve gained from their bloodlines. Passed down from one generation to the next. They have learned how to plan and plan and plan... but none can execute or come close to taking the correct course of action.

“What did you say to your mom while she lay dead next to you? What was so important to say that you needed to get off your mind? There you are after taking her all the way to the bardo and sliding your rapier dagger across her throat. She slips into death beside you and then . . . ?” Terrence asks, shrugging.

Before answering him, “Drink your tea,” I tell them, watching like a cliff bird stalking a carcass for any sign of meat to devour. Careful and in ultra-slow motion, they pick up their cups and drink. Perhaps for the first time in their lives, they have just now performed a task with full consciousness and mindfulness of each movement. The sounds of them slurping still grate at my nerves. After they finish the drink, returning the cups to the bone-white saucers with every cautious movement as before when they lifted the cups, I continue to explain.

“There was nothing I needed to get out of my mind. I just wanted to let her know once more, for the thousandth time again, that I do not want my great uncle’s neurolink implant. I want Mahá’s. His device is one of the few remaining with any true integrity.

“Once our ancestors landed, they downloaded all the first-generation neurolinks into the one set of replacement bio-devices the cyborgs provided us. Now we are stuck with these eight hundred-year-old bio-mechanics. They have all but become useless.

“Anyway, I got out of her bed and blew out all the butter lamps. The smoke mingled with the wet-metal-like smell of her blood, so powerful it leaves a metallic taste in my mouth. I swallowed hard and left her there in the blood-soaked sheets, mattress, and the blackness.

“Pay attention now, you two. Because now the actions are going to make the story more profound, and it turns from dark and mysterious to pure black and evil. This is where your role as my foot soldiers become defined.

“After donning the protective robe and my full headgear, I got into a cart that I had programmed to be waiting for me outside. The cart took me down the mountain and onto Orchard Road, all the way to the witch of Ziran’s house. Once I arrived at Vallena’s garden home. Determined I went inside. There, I found the two of them fast asleep in bed together. Mahá and Vallena are both naked, and the smell of their lovemaking still permeates the room.

“Quiet as a seed opening when it sprouts its roots into the soil, I stand at the foot of the bed looking at them. Her body is hideous. She has nothing between her legs that could make any man desire it and no tits to desire either. I can’t understand why my father wants this scamp when he already has the most beautiful woman in the Galaxy at the top of the mountain in his true home.

I can hear the conscious machine and its supercomputer in the backroom. It’s playing the song, Drive by Joe Bonamassa.

‘Idiots have a conscious machine at their disposal, but the only thing they can accomplish is to have it play music!’

“Watch this monitor over here on the wall.” I point at the huge wall display behind me and start to transmit the video memory from the neurolink inside my brain. It was once inside his head, but now it is mine.

“What you’re about to see are the final thoughts and images in the life of Mahá,” I tell them as the neurolink begins to transmit. --

“What was that? Is that Zosimos calling me?” ‘Dad, dad. Wake up, dad.’ “He called me dad. This must be a dream.” My eyes open, and there, standing beside the bed, is Zosimos. “What is it, son? What’s the matter?” As I rise onto my elbows, I feel a sudden stabbing pain in my chest. “What the hell is that? My chest feels like it’s on fire.” I look down and see my son’s hand holding the handle of my ceremonial dagger with the blade of it buried inside me. I fall back onto the bed and feel a sharp, stinging, and burning sensation in my throat. I open my eyes again to see him pulling a second dagger from my neck. My eyes turn to look at Vallena, and I try to use my arm and hand to pull the covers up over her exposed naked body.

The wall display goes black.

“Well, that was it for Mahá, boys, I say to them when the monitor goes black. He didn’t even have thought about why or what was going on. He just laid there quite-minded and died. What happens next? I’ll have to tell you because I didn’t have his neurolink in my head yet. So listen close.”