

“And Simon brought word from a band of humpback shepherds that Philos had gathered a mighty army of Moon and Bison Warriors, also off worlders and was coming east to destroy King Tiberius,” **from the Triad Faces of Tiberius A.D. 200126.**



Illustration 124: A Bison warrior with a mace he swings on the end of a rope, of course it has to be spiked.

And that day Tiberius unable to put off the conquest of the rebels gathered together a mighty host to go west and meet Philos, son of evil Hagar.

Never upon Tagget had such an army of one hundred thousand assembled before. Its coloured standards held high, musicians beating drums, trumpets, pipes, horns, thousands of chariots and humpback shepherds, all raising a huge orange dust cloud.

A mighty sight.

“Only the dragon could do such a thing,” the people of City Tagget muttered and began to realise they were glad they had not killed Tiberius in the arena.

“I knew you would go west and we follow, we are the same Tiberius,” Lord Harkos “seekers of knowledge,” as they sat next to sun birds perched on green basalt rock....*but Tiberius was a conqueror like Alexander*

For Belenos had brought friends, more sun birds as the monster understood we wanted more birds to fly next to Tiberius.

Tiberius was imagining real aerial dog fights.

Sun Birds myths?

We who had become the Close Band, myself Simon, Dracon, Morgan, Harkos, Zane and Morag. The later only because Tiberius felt angry for her loneliness for she needed human company or would go insane.

Sure there were human mercenaries but Morag liked to be seen with those in charge. Anyway the mercenaries did use her worse than Wayne; Morag liked to give her charms to those in power, not ruffians.

Poor Morag Brown had not adapted to this alien world. There are humans and aliens who can't, she was not alone.

One is brought up with the strange orange sand and blue grass of Tagget or one is not. The bare bones in the desert are testimonial to off worlders JUST LYING DOWN to await deliberately THE ANTS.....suicide.

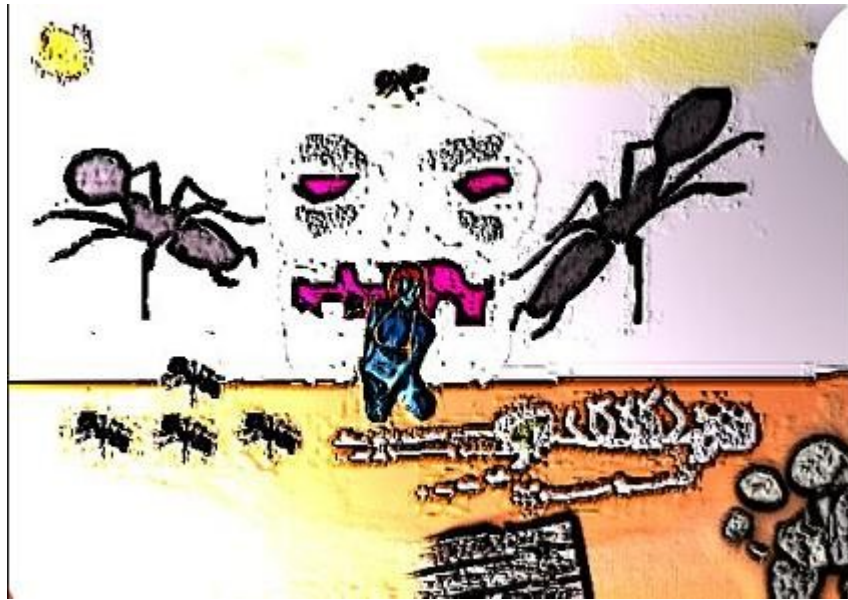


Illustration 125: Earth had its lover's leaps, Tagget had the desert and ants and litter.

There is no change of mind once the red ants in seconds have found you. And when the dying starts a self inbuilt survival mechanism takes over and you want to live, but is too late, just like jumping off a tall building....horrible.

The ants are too quick.

Some of us of the Close Band were flying ahead, (for being in the Close Band we were expected to fly on sun birds) of the main army seeking our enemy Philos, which made Tiberius wish he had brought his large silver ship for aerial recon *but there is a difference between fling a ship and a sun bird!*

And Harkos had the job of teaching the new pilots to fly.

There were was no shortage of recruits as Taggetians are a brave folk.



Illustration 126: They got parachutes as pilots was expensive to train. And the flowers are used as a scale to Sun bird's height. The danger to the pilots were the insect parasites on the birds, they were big!

I think secretively he preferred it this way and was similar to Zane Cameron in this respect. Here was raw life without the polluted trappings of civilisation.

A return to primitive ways.

It made them both rely on their own muscle making them feel powerful. Soaking the atmosphere, the squeaking chariot wheels, the copper axe heads and the sprinkling of iron headed weapons, for Tiberius had introduced foundries.

The black armour, smell of humpbacks, camp follower perfumes of whom many were priestesses come to comfort their god's warriors.

It was stepping back in time.

And riding a sun bird the warm wind billowing your hair, and Tiberius had let his hair grow long these days.

Long brown and oily.

I think being king had overcome Tiberius. The native Taggetians thought so but were happy, having the dragon meant the land was fertile and so far nothing had happened to change their mood.

Even though a new sickness was sweeping the land, there was always plague and rumour had it Emperor Woo, The Medic was behind the virus since Tiberius had spoken to Morag Brown so he was not blamed.

Yes Tiberius was afraid of the new sickness for it was meant to wipe out Tagget for humans which meant a war was coming.

And The Medic could be bought to provide a cure or it be squeezed out of him at the end of a new iron sword point.

And Tiberius hoped the medicine he had introduced; (*he had dragged many human doctors from human mining camps to teach Taggetians in a new school at Sun Cathedral*) might provide a cure?.

And then it happened, Tiberius came upon Philos son of Hagar.

Now Philos was at the head of a vast column of Taggetian Armoured Insects, huge mauve and green armoured beetles with mandibles that cut men in half.



Illustration 127: "Someone run down to hardware and buy some DDT"

To show bravery Philos stood up from his yellow cushioned black howdah and was not afraid.

The Medic paid with enough gold had transplanted the head of Philos onto a sun warrior's body. A fine body, young and muscular and much improved on the lankier version of Philos's original body.

"Tiberius, don't approach nearer," Harkos warned.

But Tiberius was he who he was and swooped down on Belenos for he had never seen the beetles before and wanted to know what he was about to fight and kill.

Now Tiberius had much to learn about his adopted planet.

For Philos commanded the front rank of beetles to present their bottoms at him.

And the insects filled the air about Tiberius with a blue cloud and Tiberius and his sun bird Belenos fell to the ground poisoned and then where beaten unconscious with the flats of swords.

“I come Tiberius,” Dracon shouted and flew to help Tiberius.

“No, we cannot help him this way,” I Simon jumping onto Morgan’s Sun Bird.

“Get off Simon, Tiberius needs us,” Morgan hissed.

Her love for Tiberius was great and she did not want to listen to reason that demanded unless we came back with an army we could do nothing for Tiberius our king.

“Stay here Zane, spy on them only, we shall be back,” I shouted and in the excitement forgot he carried Hagar’s head in a basket. Remember I am a data scribe not a warrior by trade, a man used to cells lit by candles with heaps of books.

Now Zane was thrilled, he was no longer the lawyer with dreams of a legal profession but the **swash buckling hero known as Yellow Star Bird**.

But unfortunately for his fan club it was limited to our side and not the enemy.

Why Morag Brown looked at Zane wishing he wouldn’t stay for she had allied herself to him, for they had arrived from Earth together and so clung to him more so now since she found Morgan blocking her advances to Tiberius.

And she was pregnant but by whom; such the way of sacred nature.

Closeness was a better word.

So stayed against her better judgement.

“Good luck,” I Simon shouted and turned my Sun Bird towards the noon suns were our army was.

Then it dawned, I had jumped from one Sun Bird to another and back. Never had I been courageous and looked back at an unconscious Tiberius whom I was glad I had met.

*

Dracon was alone for his Sun Bird fell dead and seeing Zane with laser hold off the enemy sheltering behind their reflector shields, picked Tiberius up and ran hobbling across orange sand, hoping to seek rescue from Zane.

He never got a hundred yards.

Now sun reflectors use sun rays too shot targets with flame. (The mirror Ino had traded to The Medic for medicine to stay out in the sun). On an armoured beetle one shot a ray of light at Zane who dropped from the sky with his blazing sun bird.

Then the sun warriors he had been shooting at regrouped their savage composure and charged Dracon.

Lo they did not beat him with the flats of their swords but pierced his parts Tiberius's body on his back did not cover.

They ended Dracon's plight by cutting the tendons on the back of his knees so he fell.

Then pierced his limbs.

And dragged King Tiberius off him and away.

Now they would have finished Dracon but a tribune seeing Dracon was brave spared him the fatal neck nick.

And the moon warriors reformed, banged once their swords against their black body armour in salute to Dracon and stomped off back to the protection of the armoured beetles.

It was up to Dracon to escape the ants.



Illustration 128: The moon warrior wasn't afraid of the things that bump in the night as he was the bump!

Yes they honoured Dracon who thought otherwise.....

Already his blood was on the wind.

Morag watched.

She was afraid which is not condemnable, who wouldn't be?

She had not wanted to come to this world. Her battles were with lustful men on Earth. Her mentality was geared to a way of life refined to lace knickers and perfumed baths, *but just as brutal*.

She was lonely, Dracon, Zane, Tiberius and while drunk even snake men. Any flesh was preferable to none her mind reasoned; she had cheapened herself long ago; she needed to love herself a BIT MORE that is all.

She was not a happy woman.

She is guiltless.

It was her way.

*

Now Philos overcome by stupidity ordered his scouts to find the army of Tiberius. The only sensible thing he did was to send Tiberius back to Ino, with a message:

“Make haste,

I go to Tagget,

My father waits.”

Since Philos reckoned his enemies would be leaderless without Tiberius. In that case
he should have decapitated

Tiberius Grant

And sent the head ahead to scare his foes.

And Philos's saw his father's head was strapped to the back of Zane's Sun Bird.

Philos wanted Ino and The Medic to praise him over his live trophy.....he was a fool.

And there was still Morgan and myself and more importantly, the new Harkos who inspired the ridicule of his foes.

'Lady Man,' they called him which is to a Taggetian a homosexual. All because Harkos loved growing things.

"Never," Simon for the sun warriors of Tiberius had come to respect Harkos's peaceful ways. Knew times were changing, that when war ceased they would need Harkos to unite all Taggetians in peace and show them other skills.

The Lady Man had introduced land ownership, was irrigating the orange desert; suddenly sun warriors found the land given to them installed pride of ownership.

The blue grass made the orange desert give life instead of taking it for once.

They did not want to give up their new orange yellow mud brick homesteads, their herds of multicoloured humpbacks, wells, new streams, women and kids.

For a sun warrior could have more than one wife. It was the way, he would couple often and his women give replicas of himself.....strong warriors.

It broadened the warrior gene pool, warriors didn't have long lives, so it was important that their genes got into the gene pool.

It made sure the best genes did not become extinct. And a barren wife became nanny to the children and a barren warrior gave up his women, went to war and was killed.

It was the way.

And they still found they could keep the old warrior ways in the wars of Tiberius their king.

They still had their honour.

Tiberius was their War Lord and King, the dragon who must eventually return where he came. No amount of modern imports could take away their superstitions.

Harkos they knew his time would come to be king. He was after all a native and they would fight to stop Philos sending them back to the copper age.

The copper age where only war existed.

See, Tiberius was settling them, and once settled Harkos saw to their needs.

Their children were learning to read' it was a miracle provided by the dragon.

The sun was indeed walking in Tiberius and like all religious myths they knew the god would make the ultimate sacrifice for their benefit, himself.

Of course Tiberius didn't know this, either did I or I might have warned him.

But he did want to be a king?

I had got to like the general, he wasn't the normal mercenary off worlder that visited, killed a few thousand Taggetians and left with gold and slaves.

Tiberius it seemed against his better judgement has stayed to help Tagget help itself against human exploitation.

And there was another reason the warriors would fight for Harkos, they knew Philos would bury them up to their necks as red ant food.

And what would Philos do to their children and women?

And Philos who called himself a mighty man led his army against Morgan the off wordier, and the sun warriors on both sides heaved with pikes so that neither army broke and ran.

Behold.....the push from the back ranks impaled twenty a time on the pikes in less than a minute.

Even the scythed chariots came to a stop as the blades ground to a halt amongst the press of bodies and the humpbacks pulling them became easy prey, for being taller than a man had their bellies opened and so their entrails fell out.

And the air was rent with screams, clash of metal and dust columns from ants moving on the flanks, dragging away the dead and living.

Warriors let lose arrows, axe and spear in the general direction of his enemy and the air was dark with missiles.

ALL WAS MELEE AND STINK.....WAR.

And life made by the unseen animator perished, desert gopher burrows collapsed under the weight of the warrior and cacti was uprooted in the chariot path.

All was death and none sorrowed for the pup of the desert wolf with a spear in its side.....and its mother wailed for it was a mother with feelings.

And the slaughter on both sides was great, so that when the moon rose the sun warriors retreated leaving the moon warriors and off worlders to fight.

And both Morgan and Philos knew they did not have enough moon warriors amongst their midst to win the battle for. sun warriors fight under the sun their god for so when they fall their souls enter that kingdom. To die at night one's soul went to the

moon. The domain of the goddess Dana Artemis Ana Anu and her moon warriors. There always under her command and her nymphs, serving them as gelded slaves or chained stallions. Both living in darkness, never seeing the glory of their god the sun.



Illustration 129: The Sun god of the Snake People.

And the moon warrior knew if he died in daylight the moon would come and take him back to the night. Where not many moons of Planet Tagget seen during the day doing this.

Coming to bed the suns and make night light.

And when they came to a sun they took moon warriors found there home to a moon.

Why Philos did not want to fight at night for demons and blood sucking creatures walked then. Also he had escaped death many times that day, so he feared his lucky charms were exhausted.

And when the sun rose the next day, Morgan saw the dead frozen in the way they slain while swarms of ants cleaned their carcasses.

“We must follow Philos,” Morgan to General Ferdis while Harkos favoured retreat till more sun warriors could be obtained.

“Tiberius needs us,” I Simon advised and all forgave Harkos his way and all wondered where Morag Brown was for she had not returned the day before when Tiberius fell out of the sky.

And we looked and found her not.

“And what about the off worlders Philos had? They were many,” Harkos worried.

“Emperor Woo,” I Simon for that is what The Medic was known amongst Taggetians.

“Forgive me Tiberius,” for Morgan knew someone must leave Tagget to recruit more off world mercenaries if we wanted to defeat The Medic and force a cure out of him for the sickness.

And part of me wished Philos do what he must with Tiberius when I saw how beautiful my friend Morgan was and wanted more.

And the war had taken on a new sinister meaning, we were fighting The Medic.

What were his motives for being on Tagget?

Had he arrived ahead of Wayne as advance guard?

None knew the answer but he was a human.

And Morag had told us Wayne had paid him to poison us with sickness.

And guilt spawned in Morgan from love to Tiberius and her general's responsibility to recruit more mercenaries.

"Give me your most trusted off worlders and they will return with me to Tagget City. They can fly the silver ship and bring more friends here," Harkos suggested and Morgan looked at him thankfully.

Therefore Morgan selected five and Harkos would trust them with a king's ransom, and it was The Ransom of King Tiberius.

Harkos also promised them each a king's ransom when they returned.....they were mercenaries.

(They never returned with the ship, they preferred to terrorise shipping lanes.)

Which meant Harkos had not gone with them and just as well or they did have turned him into a snake slave cleaning the ship's latrines and bilge tanks.

So it was then that Harkos returned and Morgan was wrath with him for he should have gone and faced his fate. In her anguish for Tiberius she had forgotten Harkos was a timid creature.

Now Harkos turned and saw all the officers waiting and behind them our warrior host.

"The dragon has gone home," General Ferdis explained meaning Tiberius was dead, and fell to his knees in front of Harkos, adding, "King Harkos, High King of Tagget."

And the army shouted it.

“No no not me, I am a farmer not a king,” Harkos protested.

Now the soldiers persisted and Harkos fell silent, away deep in thought and all fell quiet and Morgan fumed.



Illustration 130: The Moon Goddess had many faces to allure moon warriors to her Heavens. Complete opposite to the gloomy Sun God, she demanded gaiety out of her followers, whereas the Sun God demanded hearts, unattached ones.

“I accept,” Harkos suddenly seeing as king he could keep our army united and accomplish something; as if he had been waiting to rule and irrigate the whole of Tagget.

Now Morgan was wrath, where was their loyalty to Tiberius, he who had done so much for them?

She had forgotten where had there loyalty been when Ino needed them?

They might be warriors but they were no better than the mercenaries. But as warriors they did change they allegiance many times from Lord of this Canton to Lord of that Canton when their political ideas shifted with their conscience.

“It is the way,” I Simon grabbing her right elbow, restraining her from saying anything that might jeopardy the safety of our liege Tiberius.

And King Harkos explained what he planned and the warriors knelt, squatted or stood listening.

“We will not let Philos have the dragon. May Philos's lands remain barren with the plague,” General Ferdis agreed.

And Morgan knew as I did that the sun warriors would help, not because they loved Tiberius but because they did not want their dragon to shower fertility upon Philos.

“What happens when Tiberius returns?” Morgan asked Harkos.

“He becomes king again; he is the dragon isn’t he? I don't want a civil war, I am a farmer,” Harkos stoically.

And a warm ironic smile crossed her face; this was Tagget, gentle Harkos better watch out for assassins, he was so naïve you could not hate him

And one hour later: Morgan with General Ferdis set off following the trail of Philos and it was not hard to not follow, for the badly wounded had been left to die under the sun their god Ceugant Dana.

And many had been covered in a blanket of red ants.

What brave snake men, many had nicked their own throats than become insect food.....they would not go to the Hall of Heroes.

It was the way, they had not died from an enemy's sword and the way was changing in the army of Tiberius, for he backed his warriors up with modern medicine so that his casualties were low and showed them a warrior did not have to die to be brave.

Now if Tiberius had been here he did have saved the wounded and they swear loyalty to him for he did have given them a second chance to die brave men.....*what a stubborn folk*

But Ferdis was at the helm and he ordered all the wounded to be slain and Morgan did not interfere for she did not want to alienate herself from him and drive them away from helping Tiberius.

So she reasoned.

To enter the Hall of Heroes they must die under an enemy's sword.

And Morgan saw that Tiberius had a lot of work on his hands when or if he returned to change these snake people into the modern world. She also wondered why he had fallen in love with the orange sand he now called home.

The thought tickled her, maybe at last she could get Tiberius to settle down and have her family at last. Also she refused to acknowledge the existence of Ino's child.



Illustration 130: General Ferdis, wild and woolly, a leader of warriors running screaming into an enemy; he also knew what side his bread the butter was on.

Now a pack of yellow desert rats disturbed by the dying came out of borrows to watch. One looked very fat; it then in front of us exploded into a slime ball.

One tiny atom hit a sun warrior in the face. A week later he would be dead but not before Ferdis and his men knew they needed Tiberius back to rid them of the sickness with his fertility.

The absence of Tiberius had robbed the land of its fertility.

Behold the new sickness had caught up with the army, not to mention the rest of Tagget.

Now Morgan and I knew better, we must find Emperor Woo and get the vaccine.

And a lone blue buzzard was joined by others overhead as they waited for dinner. The sun warriors were pleased for these carrion birds carried sun warrior souls in their bellies to the clouds, where escaping went to a sun.

These blue birds would also eat the virus.

And the scent of cacti blossom covered our bodies so that we smelt of the desert.

Anyway.....

Mid day a week later we stopped at a red river. I did not know its name for none had come this far west. I think now our sun warrior General Ferdis saw the wisdom of keeping prisoners for information.

And we saw two dead armoured beetles in the shallows with innards drifting.

It was obvious they had exploded and Morgan forbade all from drinking from the water.....the new sickness was here.

And some warriors looked at each other knowing they had drunk death before her command. These men must find the enemy and die in battle to go to a sun; the thought of choking a vaccine out of Woo did not register in their copper age minds.

The dragon must be brought back.

Pestilence was upon them, it already was but that was in the past, now was the present.

And ahead Morag Brown couldn't believe she was doing what she was?