

Tiberius

Philos and Tiberius

Scenario: Emerald City, green predominates as a colour everywhere.



Illustration 144: It was a city built in a giant cave system, obviously of emeralds.

Tiberius could not believe the sights Morag and part were just seeing too. And if the later party were lucky they might see more.

Like the giant hieroglyphic carvings that Tiberius was now standing under in a large chamber. Many spiders in corner webs amongst the chiselled noses and arms stared back at him cheekily.

“Magnificent are they not?” The voice was male, smooth and confident.

Tiberius turned facing a god face mask.

Tommy Woo had heard a lot about Tiberius Grant before coming to this planet. Tiberius the mercenary, well Tommy Woo was thinking maybe if the price was right Tiberius might fight for him.

He had been brought up on Tiberius's exploits, no one wonder Woo wanted to meet a childhood super hero.

Tiberius after all had got himself caught up in all this king nonsense just to try and grab as much of Tagget for himself, Woo reasoned from greed.

Tiberius must have a price then.

Tiberius must also know he was on the losing side too.

Tiberius must also know Wayne was on his way.

Tiberius also that the alien Emperor Lobodocus was trailing Wayne.

Yes Tiberius needed Tommy Woo urgently.

In fact they needed each other urgently to survive.

Just now Planet Tagget was big enough for both, later only one must be the winner,” so thought god Woo.

“Yes they are,” Tiberius guessing the face the workmen were chiselling out of the green emerald belonged to the man next to him.

If he was a man?

Maybe a robot or something, strange things happened these days.

And Woo was upset his image had not made Tiberius prostrate himself but Tiberius had seen all before, was getting tired, was getting old, needed settling to put his feet up on a stool.

So poor Tommy Woo explained things to Tiberius who if he was supposed to kiss dirt god Woo had another thing coming, Tiberius now knew who he was speaking to?

A man with vision,

A crazy megalomaniac nutter.

And Woo must have known Tiberius because he read the comic strips on him.....

.....



Illustration 145: Tiberius the cartoon strip was dressed in military greens and navy seal blue someplace!

“Well, I isn’t known for changing sides your imperial Highness,” and Emperor Woo remembered Hagar and Ino and remembered the comic books. “But we do need to join to take Wayne out and then there is this sneaky alien Lobodicus who intends

to make Mongolian Hotpot out of us, let's shake," and Tiberius forced himself to put out a hand.

Emperor Woo was delighted; he had visions of his comic book hero cleaning space from his enemies. Of bowing to him and eventually kissing dirt, yes there was a price for Tiberius to do that too.

A weakness to be exploited, god Woo would find the price and weaknesses?

Since Woo was always surrounded by warriors and others, scribes appeared dressed as multicoloured quills.

"I Tiberius, vassal of Emperor Woo," Tiberius heard Woo dictate and thought, "also vassal to dogs and squirrels, go and write what you want Woo, even it rained frogs and newts for all I care"....."appoint Woo my heir."

"I don't fear you only the sky falling on my head and the waves drowning me," Tiberius thought.

And signed where Woo indicated.

"By the way I am seeking Philos, is he here?" Tiberius asked trying to be innocent.

"Yes as my guest, friend and a governor of a province," Woo replied but the mask hid his facial expressions.

At least Tiberius knew where he stood, future governor would be right?

"To escape and destroy us both, ah freedom is not to be thrown away on a whim Tiberius?"



Illustration146: Scribes dressed to advertise their profession; it must have been hot to be a quill?

And at that moment a snake labourer fell off a scaffold a hundred feet up from the chiselled face.

Before he hit bottom a strange bird caught him and bit him in half.

Then other birds and fought over his bits so his entrails untwined in the air.

It rained nasty stuff.

“Those that disobey join work gangs,” Woo unperturbed and Tiberius saw his future again. Also noted the armed sun and bison warriors guarding the slave overseers with lasers and guessed this Woo guy if not stopped would be conquering them all.

Gad help them when he did if one judges a man by his friends.

“Make yourself at home Tiberius, tonight you will dine with me and Philos your friend,” Woo.

At that moment the left nostril the deceased workman had been working on fell away.

Woo froze with rage.....seemed to move as if his joints needed oiling and opened a door in the cavern wall.

Above slaves were being rounded up.

Woo let the door slide shut behind him.

And Tiberius the inquisitive found it locked and explained why his new companions, bison men didn't stop him.

It was the screams that made Tiberius look, the whole slave gang was being goaded to jump or be speared.

They fell like large hailstones.

When it was all over a new slave gang was brought in while turtle slaves cleared the mess up on the cavern floor.

These men would now thank their god Woo for the plentiful supply of snake meat.

And Tiberius was confirmed in his opinion of Woo as deranged.

*

A new sound, it was Dracon swearing, and Tiberius saw his friend disappearing down a trap door in the cavern floor.

Ignoring his bison men guards he went after Dracon, mingling with slaves in an effort to be hidden.

Didn't Woo say to treat the place like home?

HE WAS WRONG.

As Tiberius was about to lever up the trap door:

He noticed human feet at foot level.

The laser handle just in vision.

An open shirt at waist level.

And imagined the knowing grin on a face,

The recognition in a killer's eyes.

The glee at the prospect of killing Tiberius. Guess god Woo was no fool, guess that treaty was worth nothing, guess Tiberius was about to hand in his chips?

"What are you doing Tiberius?" The man asked leaning down so his lips were at Tiberius's eye level.

When you are dealing with a man like Tiberius it is best not to get so close. “I thought I saw my friend go down here,” is all Tiberius said truthfully before he took hold of the laser pushing down and with the other hand the man’s neck and dropped down the trap door pulling the man down too.

The trap door shut on the man’s back heavily.

They both skimped down the ladder rings.

Gad that hurt.

It hurt more for the man for the laser went off several times and Tiberius was a fit man, his muscular hands pushed the lethal weapon into the man’s belly.

To make sure the man was dead, Tiberius jumped onto his spine, snapping it.

WAR.

Now he dragged the man into some shadows, stripped him of his weapons and smothered him under wheel barrows.

TIBERIUS WAS DEADLY.

It was 200126 A.D., heroes acted like heroes out of comic books with a difference, there was real death with lots of red stuff that got sticky when it coagulated. No coshing and tying up villains and then wait for the cops to arrive and then ride off into the sunset with a beautiful heiress. It was about surviving and fighting on the villains terms and making sure Tiberius Grant lived another day.

Anyway Tiberius went on down the tunnels lit by fire flies the size of a football; there was no need for oil polluting power plants above, Woo The Medic made do with what nature provided.

AFTER ALL WOO WAS A SCIENTIFIC WONDER HIMSELF.

And quite by accident Tiberius found cells with sleeping labourers in them. Ahead he could hear the crack of whips, moans and the curses of guards.

The night shift was coming.

Lo Tiberius ducked into a room and found Bison man armour. It stunk of leather but he still put it on and stunk more close up of someone's sweat.

Out of the darkness of his cell he watched the slave gang shuffle past all chained by the ankle.

One fell and the lot fell and Tiberius cursed for guards set upon them whipping till all got up and moved on.

And Tiberius was amazed to see not all slaves were snakes but off worlder aliens or an unknown Taggetian race, these folk had webbed feet and hands.

These men wore a one piece garment, fine as silk, worn out now, and short leather kilts from which hung empty scabbards.

One or two classical Roman helmets.

Some had reflective laser vests on still.

Tiberius the scientist, he wanted to know who these people were, if he had a ship he did explore the universes till he found them.

Morgan was right, after finding them he did return to her for a weekends fling.

If Tiberius had only known he was facing that feared race of the Emperor Lobodicus.

In fact every one of their past emperors was called Lobodicus.....*it was their way.*



Illustration 147: Romans in the Gloaming?

Why they had different shades of iris, skin, hair from brown to blond and if weren't for their webbed hands and feet Tiberius would say they was

HUMAN.

Tiberius had never seen such handsome folk?

Apart from himself?

Now Tiberius had knowledge, what was evil and what is good.

And definitely didn't like the treatment handed out;

Tiberius knew that was evil.

He had travelled deep space and one thing always hit you when you looked out a viewing screen at all those stars and milky ways was that you were part of something alive, you belonged.

And right now seeing that evil treatment handed out made him feel like one with all those slaves; in other words they were all bothers and sisters of something.

Now two more of these strangers fell.

And the whip masters came and a fallen was a female and a male lay upon her sheltering her.

His friends tried to raise him but whip masters pulled him away and whipped the man brutally; it seemed to Tiberius they had no intention of whipping him to stand up.

And was proved right when a guard stuck a trident into the alien's back and twisted and pulled.

A dangling organ was offered to a turtle task master who ate it raw.

WAR.

Tiberius knew there died a brave and honourable man.

Tiberius didn't like this Emperor Woo.

Tiberius at last strapped on the bison warrior's mask and went out.

Tiberius heard a faint moan, the female was alive.

Now he did what only Tiberius could do, he opened the door to hell and shot the guards and then the whip masters and stood his ground till none of his enemies were left standing; he killed two guards and four whip masters taking all by surprise as he took the fight to them.

Hurriedly he unchained the gang and allowed them to go where they thought escape lay, but of the girl he took her into that cell and it became crowded in there for four of these strange aliens followed him, friends of the girl.

In the cell he forced water into the woman's mouth as the others drank. The cell was a bison warrior's cell with weapons and food laid out on table and wall rack.

"Who are you?" Tiberius asked.

"Fial," she answered, "you?"

"I am Tiberius Grant."

"We know you," the other aliens answered for the girl and looked at Tiberius.

Now the girl refreshed got a little strength back and sat up opened legged on the bunk Tiberius being Tiberius could not help but noticing she was more human than he cared too imagine.

"You must help me escape from here Tiberius," she begged.

Tiberius grunted his humour.

"You must pretend to be my slaves," he told them.

But one of the aliens had found bison armour and put it on. Tiberius allowed this, next time they took a party by surprise that party might be larger.

He also noticed the other aliens slip daggers into their ripped tunics.

Smiling he led them out into the tunnel liking his new fighting friends. Here they said a quick goodbye to their slain comrade, he would never be forgotten as long as they lived, and then moved on.

So it was not long till they came across his Earth friends chained to walls in a large cell.

“We are your relief,” Tiberius told the two bison guards.

“What of this female?” They asked.

“For your amusement,” he grunted.

At once the guards pulled the struggling webbed woman into an adjoining cell.

“Pig,” she shouted at Tiberius thinking he had forfeited her.

“General,” Tiberius coughed.

Tiberius held up a silencing hand, he was waiting for the bison men to drop their shorts. Only a man like Tiberius would think of such details!

“I am first,” one complained from the cell and this was Tiberius’s cue for he burst upon them slashing his copper sword down the one attempting to couple.

The other ran for his weapons but tripped over his own pants about his ankles.

A mighty sweep of a sword held by one of the aliens cut off the warrior’s head so it rolled to stop at Tiberius’s feet.

The eyes were still alive slowly dimming as oxygen diminished.

“I was wrong to think you had deserted me human, trust is lacking,” Fial standing up, climbing into a leather kilt, arming herself with weapons and putting on bison

armour. She showed no signs of embarrassment, what Tiberius saw he liked and was part of the way. Male meets female, a natural function, coupling, child birth, even the passing of waste, all natural functions.

But they whom had tried to force coupling, they were of the

ASHAMED.

It was the way and the Lobodicusians like Tiberius followed it.

“Any enemy of Woo is a friend of mine,” he replied.

“And hopefully of Wayne Haslam?” She asked.

“Who are you?” He asked fearing their little party was about to disintegrate over politics.

She smiled and went with her friends to free a fretting Zane and an Impatient Dracon for Morag was still at the mercy of King Formorian.

Tiberius would come for her too; she was of The Close Band, a friend.

*

Tiberius led darting down green corridors that went deeper under the rift and stopped outside a cell because of piled up empty turtle shells.

This cell was large and stunk of blood which came from a corridor at the other end where steam escaped.

“Put one on Zane then I will strap Dracon,” Tiberius for he had seen turtle folk carry big loads like Dracon.

“I will go ahead and clear the corridor,” Fial told Tiberius and he saw in her eyes independence so said nothing.

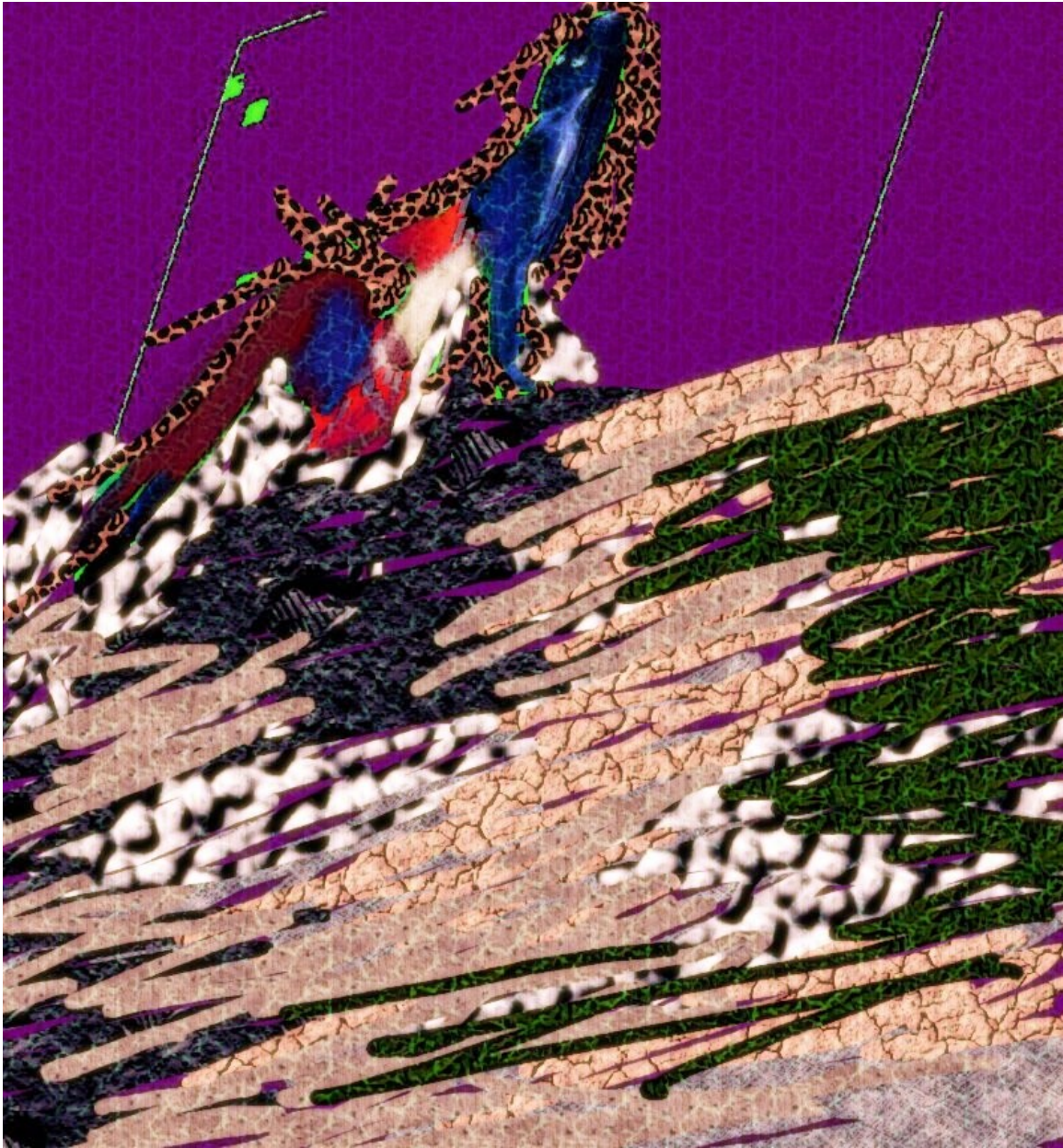


Illustration 148: Tiberius her name was Fial, what will you do now?

She was going to do things her way.

“If we meet again I shall make sure you are spared Tiberius,” she told him.

“From whom?” Tiberius asked annoyed and puzzled.

She just smiled and ran off shouting the slaves were free.

For a rouse it had worked for he watched snake warriors run after her and her kind back the way they had come. Fortunately Tiberius was free to move unhindered and unfortunately they had entered the kitchens.

The Emperor Woo had plans for the turtle folk.

So Tiberius saw at his end a stopped meat conveyor with slaughtered turtle folk hanging from hooks, their shells ripped from their backs on a belt underneath.

“Get me out of this shell,” Zane pleaded horrified he might end up like those about him.

Tiberius ignored him and entered another room and here the slaughter men.

Primitive ape folk, shoulders hunched, bodies covered in wiry hair, dirty leather blood stained kilts, dim eyes, glad for the break for the Emperor Woo worked them sixteen hours a day.

Seven days a week.

It was industrial genocide.

Lo the nearest spat in his gruel, to them Tiberius a bison man was a cruel enemy. Bison men hunted his kind on the vast Giant Yellow Leafed Cedar Forests further west enslaving them.

Harkos had not mapped this far west so we lacked knowledge.

What saved Tiberius was that they saw Zane and wanted to touch him out of curiosity for they had never seen the such....*either had I!*



Illustration 149: Armed with flint and bone knives, the ape men were only effective if they got hold of you, then tore you apart.

Crunching they came expecting Tiberius to use his whip or sword on them like other bison men.

Now Tiberius realised all this in a flash so took off his bison mask and they saw too he was as Zane and wanted to touch him.

“I am an Earthman,” but he might have said he was the man on the moon for they were ignorant of off worlder life.

“Show us the way to the turtle King Formorian,” Tiberius asked.

And like all Taggetians speak a common tongue, all intelligent life having evolved from a common ancestor millions of years earlier.

Plus the fact that the ruling snake species made sure their reptilian dialect was learnt amongst their slaves.

It made for the easy passage of ideas and if there had been more Harkos’s about, one people, one shared world, no different nationalities, no wars.....a utopian idea.

Negatively the primitives shook their heads.

“We are escaping Emperor Woo and bison men,” Tiberius.

They understood this.....”He is our enemy too.”

“Then come with us.”

Now an explosion made the chains in the next room rattle and small stones fall from the roof, Fial was at work.

“If we stay here we shall be killed,” Tiberius and they followed arming themselves with kitchen weapons.

Tiberius was setting lose an army inside the heart of Woo’s domains.

See Fial had detonated explosives in a small barracks burying a small garrison of bison men.

Less for Tiberius to show his anger upon later was it not?

Who was this man Tiberius Grant?

He was of course Tiberius Grant.

*

The primitives which Tiberius saw as Neanderthals carried Dracon freeing Zane of his shell, so all moved quickly and across a rope bridge where on primitive fell off; and apart from a glance down to his body, all hurried on again. These poor people had grown used to the destruction of their kind, as if a divine wind was against them when it was just bad luck Woo lived amongst them.

The way was at work even here.

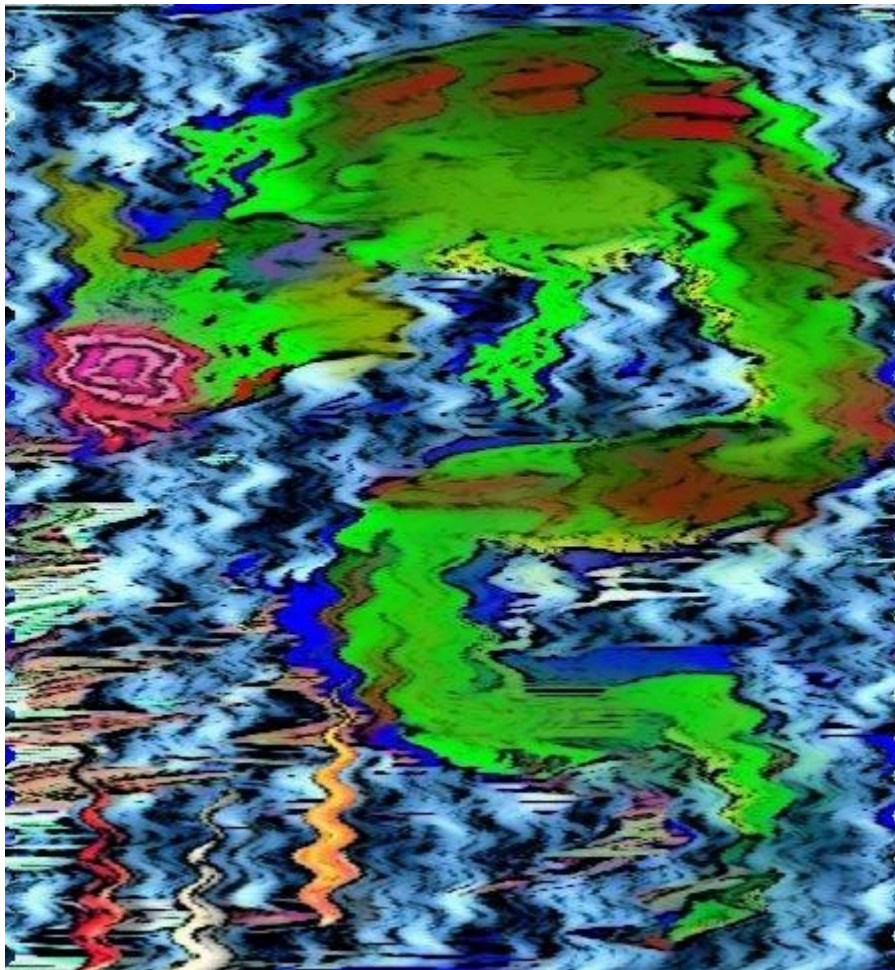


Illustration 150: Hag fish, small green hungry fish.

Now small green fish leaped out of the pools near by and devoured the dead primitive, or at least Tiberius hoped he was dead before that fate.

And ahead was real trouble for massive copper doors were guarded by many bison men.

“We are doomed,” the primitives and stopped fearful to go back or forwards?

It was well then, for the now over confident bison men drew their swords and advanced.

One bison man threw a pike and it sunk into a primitive and still they stood frozen with indecision.

A black male Hercules beetle had more sense; it crawled away into a wall crack.

This is what Tiberius liked, surprise on his side. But what surprise? He was the surprise and swatted an arrow aside with the flat of his sword. And this one act of swordsmanship stopped the advancing bison men.

“I am Tiberius Grant,” then shot six of them dead with the laser from the first man he had killed ages ago.

These bison men had never seen their own kind KILLED JUSTB LIKE THAT.

Tiberius shot another six dead which left three bison men standing just as undecided as the primitives; they should have attacked.

But now the unexpected for the primitives charged.

Now Tiberius gave the bison men credit for being brave men each rammed his short sword into an enemy before being ripped to pieces by massive hands.

“What’s behind these doors?” Tiberius not wanting to look at the trophies the primitives held.

Heads and men’s glories.

Then they started to scalp.

“The domain of King Formorian,” the biggest primitive who had spoken out earlier, “and the way to our forest homes and the City of Glow Worms where our priests rule, you come home with Crak.”

“And Morag Brown,” Zane hopefully remembering her fondly.

“We still carry him,” Crak meaning Dracon and Crak and his kind had armed themselves with bison men weapons.

Tiberius put his hands on the hilts of his weapons and grunted. This turtle king had done bad things to Morag who was one of his women; he didn’t like that, no sir Tiberius was very annoyed at what Zane had told him.

“Well King Formorian is about to meet me, Tiberius Grant.”

“Better than hanging around here,” Zane pushing the copper doors open and a rush of hot damp air greeted them.

Oh well two Turtle men guards were there too greet them.

The primitives knew how to deal with them.

Made Tiberius proud by rushing them before swords could be drawn....*surprise guess who?*

“I am Crak, how dare you kill one of us,” he pulling a spear out of the chest of a fallen comrade and “now we show you what we do to turtles on the other side of those doors,” and Crak stuck the spear into a shell.

And Tiberius knew if he was ever to unite Tagget must assert his authority now. “Enough,” so Crak and the others looked at him, wondering why he had told them to stop their grisly task of extracting turtles out of their shells to batter the tender reptile bodies with large stone.

“I am king of this planet and you are all my people, even turtle men as them, he told them and they thought Tiberius insane.

“I am The Dragon so sun warriors call me; you know who the dragon is?” He asked hoping?

“That’s all right then,” and they continued killing a few more turtles before they stopped.

“Our priests won’t be happy with this but since you helped us escape and your weapons kill better than our enemies we will be friends,” Crak and came to follow Tiberius who knew he was speaking to very simple folk so must be so patient as if he was changing a nappy on a babe’s bottom.

And it was Crak, who led for he knew the ways down here and entered a large cavern,

and

saw

Morag Brown

And since they had gone leaving not a single living turtle man to sound the alarm, for Tiberius had turned his back signalling to Crak “Well look there are some trying to escape, well?” And Crak killed them all, six in number.

But it was a case of kill or is killed and this is the way of how rulers rule with a wink wink so Tiberius was guilty of indirect rule, in fact he did not rule here and knew it.

And a lone Hercules beetle ventured out now it was safe.

“What next?” Zane asked as Tiberius followed Crak out of the slaughter room; what next indeed.

*

Tiberius looked down from the path cut out of the cavern wall. A hundred feet below he saw Morag Brown a friend lying in a pool of water with pink lilies stuck to her flesh.

She was lethargic and had committed the deadliest sin.....lost hope.

So Tiberius curled his lips in anger and Crak understood this emotion, he too curled his lips in anger.

Poor Tiberius had been in space too long, had become the created ACCIDENT of life itself. He was raw space, stripped of human civilisation, adopting the habits of those he came into contact with.

He had no morals and yet was moral.



Illustration 150: "She better be living or everything living here is dead," Tiberius thought.

HE WAS TIBERIUS GRANT.

And saw a large turtle man lounging in the pool beside Morag.

Guess Tiberius did not like what he saw which was a bad omen for the turtle men. His friend Morag was naked and Tiberius needed no deductions to guess things?

"That is King Formorian," Crak.

"What do we do Tiberius?" Zane.

"I am Tiberius Grant," a grunted reply.

He would kill Formorian.

Why?

Because Formorian had touched a human female? No, because he had taken by force which was not offered.

Now Tiberius discarded his bison head dress and walked downwards.

“Surely Tiberius has grit or is a madman?” Zane following and Crak knew the answer to this.

“He is mad, but let us follow for turtles need killing,” to his people as Tiberius now had his lasers out which was not crazy and with those Crak knew Tiberius could kill all the turtle men down there leaving none for him.

And turtle men guards saw Tiberius and ran to spear him.

Tiberius smirked, these men, looked like barrels with legs, but that did not mean he underestimated them; he had learnt eons ago never do that.

And below King Formorian actually stirred recognising Zane.

“Find out what they want? Then throw them to the Red River,” Formorian as he grabbed Morag by the right ankle pulling her away.

There was a confidence of death about Tiberius that disturbed Formorian.

And as he did this a red crested newt crawled off Morag’s right bosom.

“The Red River is a larva river,” Zane shouted.

A grunt was the reply.

And instead of killing the guards he fired over their heads; he actually felt sorry for them after seeing their slaughter at the hands of the primitives.

He wanted them to flee, the quarrel was with the rapist Formorian was it not?

“He is crazy, he must be the dragon,” Crak.

The turtle men stopped.

“Kill him fools,” Formorian alarmed.

And they obeyed throwing spears and charging.

A spear sailed over Tiberius and pierced a primitive’s neck.

“They have slings on their spears so can throw them a great distance,” Crak, “when will you kill them all? They are our enemies and you our king, then protect us King Tiberius.”

Now Tiberius felt he was responsible for the death of the primitive so killed one advancing turtle man and the rest stopped.

These where not sun warriors.

Alas Tiberius Grant saw himself as the saviour and king of the planet, the orange planet had taken his soul.....if he had one.

He was a man who would be king.

Now King Formorian being a king was more alarmed strode to get in front of his warriors to inspire them for he was a mighty man, and he dragged Morag with him.

And that is why Tiberius shot him in the heart.

“For Morag my friend,” he whispered.

At the turtle men fled and Crak and his kind followed using the dropped turtle weapons to prize off shells to expose unprotected torsos.

“Tiberius,” Morag naked sobbing in his arms.

She seemed younger, her skin vibrant and by accident Dracon was allowed to slip into the pool.

And none saw the watching bison guard slip away.

*

“Lo, man has searched for the pool of youth always, so have we aliens,” Simon
from The Triad Faces of Tiberius.

Perhaps it was the herbs given to Dracon earlier but he grew strong in the water and
 Tiberius saw Dracon’s wound heal.

So he slid in himself ignoring the slaughter of turtle guards remaining. Why he did
 this no one is sure? When one finds the garden of youth does one hesitate twiddling
 fingers while the aspiration fades and the chance of eternal youth lost?

Maybe some,

But not Tiberius Grant,

And Yellow Star Bird Zane.

Not that they needed the water since science had given them long life, but one had
 to pay for scientific wonders, this one was for free and natural.....part of the way...
so they thought at the time, but this was Woo’s domain, he who would be god.

And science had not become unethical for some said God appoints our time to
 leave this world, so science has become blasphemous by extending our lives: but not at
 all, God has extended our appointed times to pass over to the light that is all.

“Tiberius you came back to me,” and Morag sighed in love again.

“What about me?” Zane thought only.

But this was A.D. 200126 when a man and woman had more than one partner and still could be man and wife. Long life brought sexual boredom with the same partner and proven genes were needed.

It was the accepted way.

The strong must proliferate their genes down to the weakest so that their offspring become strong in the end.

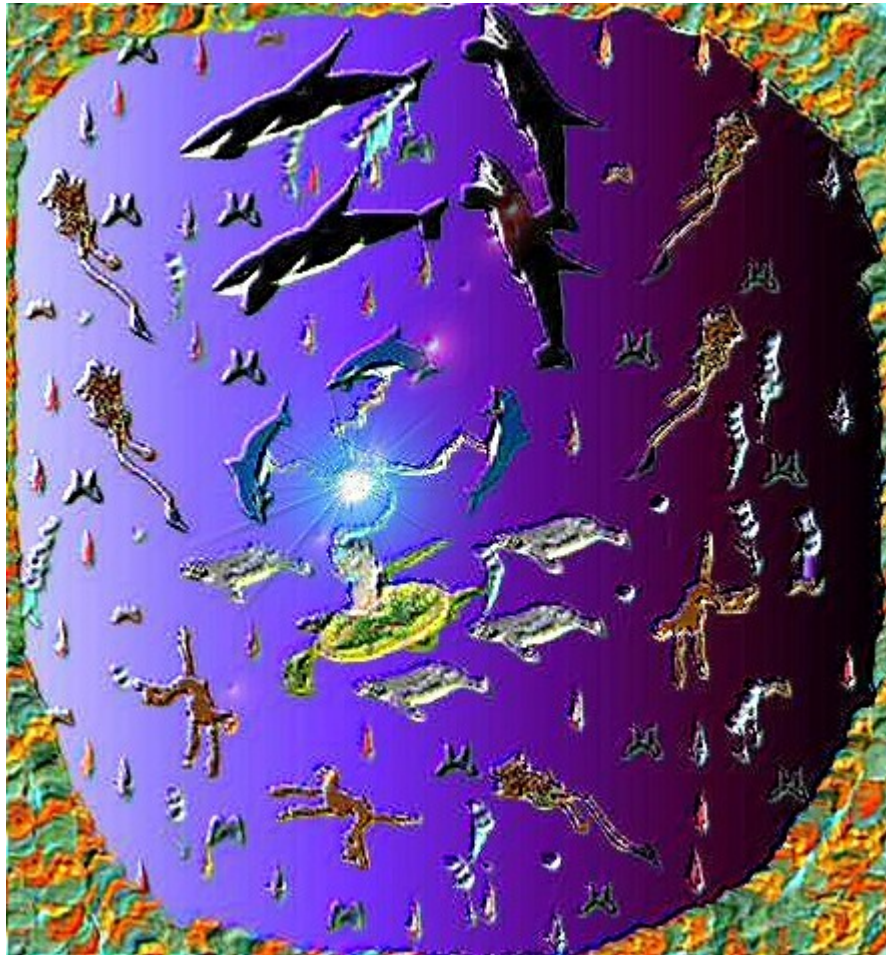


Illustration 151: Diversity the good healthy gene pool.

One man one woman was regarded as selfish keeping of wanted genetic material out of circulation.

It was the way, pollution had dictated this.

It was also the way of creation, the healthy diversification of life or all flowers would be blue and the power of creation limited which is a thought of the true blasphemer.

Now both Tiberius and Morgan followed the way and it could be a bitter pill to swallow as Morgan knew.

Then horns, gongs, bells and drums and Tiberius looked up and saw the Emperor Woo a hundred feet above.

The gold face mask radiant, his yellow silks held off the dust by primitives, turtle men and captured sun warriors.

As befitting his megalomaniacal mind his silken trail was at least sixty feet behind him. And all about him danced snakes of both sexes waving bird fans, while others sang carrying birds and holding beasts of prey on leads; jugglers and acrobats and his children and parents of the new mixed race.

And all were bedecked splendidly in fine garments and gems.

And this host spread out above for they had come to see

HE WHOM THE TAGGETIANS HAD WAITED AN HOUR TO DO SO IN THE

NOON DAY SUN.

Behind Woo were the massed spears of bison men and in front off worlder mercenaries.

Very impressive but Tiberius put his hands on his laser handles and shouted:

“I am Tiberius Grant.”

Either magnificent or crazy.

If he was scared he didn't show it and it impressed his enemies.

“I know who you are, I am going to kill you Tiberius,” but it was not Emperor Woo who spoke but the off worlder mercenary leader, who was now ordering his company of mercenaries to follow his lead and begin to aim their modern weapons at Tiberius.



Illustration 152: Fish and chips anyone?

An alien, I Simon was later told, a winged pink fish man from Talus with a gilled neck. A man who crossed Tiberius many times in the past and wanted to destroy our king slowly with his hands.

Now this made Woo both annoyed and amused at the same time over this interruption.

The alien Sigismundo had dared speak without the imperial authority of the west, the mighty Woo who dreamed of empire.

And Sigismundo had told Woo of his hated.

“I appeal to imperial equity,” Tiberius shouted and because Woo was a megalomaniac this appeal pleased him, for Tiberius unlike Sigismundo had recognised his authority in front of all.

“Let it be so,” Woo replied and what was Woo emperor of, one city? “Kneel and speak King Tiberius,” and Tiberius pleaded for a chance to fight the king’s champion on equal terms so all could see that Woo was a true emperor on Tagget who dispensed imperial justice to all.

Now this fine speech touched the family of Woo and they urged their glorious emperor to show equity.

“Go down and fight him alone Sigismundo,” for Woo actually wanted this man destroyed for that outburst earlier, in fact he hoped they would kill each other.

But Sigismundo curled his lips in disgust and decided to take the imperial throne for himself from this madman.

But he forgot who the madman was

THE MEDIC.

And Sigismundo drew his laser sword to kill Woo but bison men and his own off worlders disarmed him.

“I am one of you, your leader,” Sigismundo shouted at his company but they knew who paid them and this close quarter melee was not to their liking; modern weapons are designed to kill at a distance, the sword at close quarter.

And these men forced him to kneel to await their paymaster’s judgement.

And another off wordier mercenary pulled roughly from his neck a red robe and put it on, now the new mercenary leader.

“If I kill Sigismundo let us free and the next time we meet I will call you my older brother Woo, and Woo could fantasise over Tiberius kneeling on the orange sands, but Tiberius knew he would kill Woo next time they met.

Deep down so did Woo.

“Sigismundo your live is your own if you defeat Tiberius,” Woo ordered quietly.

And Sigismundo without adew leapt off the path and extended his deep red membranous skin that grew between his arms and legs gliding.

And for some reason Zane decided this was his day to establish himself as a super hero of Tagget and never be forgotten as the legend Yellow Star Bird.

“He’s mine, sorry Tiberius,” Zane jumping ahead telling him to take the others to freedom.

There certainly is a defiant lack of respect for kings and emperors on Tagget.

“Fool,” Tiberius answered, he had fought Sigismundo sixty years earlier, Zane had not.

So easily Sigismundo clubbed Zane who fell into the pool of health and vitality.

But Tiberius was Tiberius and he ducked and counter attack and took hold of his enemies left ankle and was taken into the air as Sigismundo laboured to fly with his new deadly cargo?



Illustration 153: Two men armed with swords so one has his chips about to be cashed.

Lo it was enough to make Sigismund crash into a green stalactite, smashing it into fragments and both men fell to the ground and Tiberius twisted so he had a soft landing on Sigismund's belly.

Now Tiberius needs not be asked twice so he thrust a fist into his old enemies face. And as Tiberius got the better Emperor Woo sent down the mercenaries to kill them both.

“How can I run?” Dracon asked and shot seven of the front rankers dead; which made the others turn and seek shelter, even fleeing, for Emperor Woo was not worth dying for.

And again Zane decided to be part of history and started firing into the ranks of bison warriors behind Woo.

This made the family of Woo scatter and the ranks of the bison men advance to shield Woo and throw missiles down.

Was Emperor Woo not a god? He could not die; he was immortal was he not? Only his spirit is not his flesh, but Woo being of darkness understood this not.

And Woo had seen Morag Brown and wanted her for human females were not counted in their thousands in Emerald City, and those that were here were even more floozy than Morag: for the mercenaries had pay to spend.

Her genes were needed and after his play and he tired of her, her eggs could be extracted and fertilised to increase the human population. And Woo used his third seer eye and saw many beautiful creatures resembling Morag and smiled.

What made Zane charge that day? He says he wasn't thinking; only that he had had an adrenalin rush and Crak and his primitives followed.

The mercenaries were really leaderless without Sigismund and climbed higher up the cavern walls to escape death.

Oh yes many fired back killing primitives but not Zane, for it was not his time to die. And Zane ran firing into the packed ranks of bison men killing many.

And Morag came alive, she picked up a fallen laser weapon and took her hate out on Woo and he survived because the brave bison men were shielding him.

And the struggle between Sigismund and Tiberius ended as the later slipped a dirk, a long dagger up through his enemy's diaphragm out the voice box, and left Sigismund admiring his own workings.

WAR.

Woo would not cure him after his previous outburst, death was coming for this man who killed others for money.

Then a rock hit anew on Zane's head stunning him and as the primitives were few, most were slain till Crak fled with the survivors and ran out of the cavern.

When things got better Tiberius could be their king again.

And without Zane the bison men in dozens advanced many falling to Dracon and Tiberius.

But the mercenaries seeing only Dracon, Zane and Morag took courage and decided to earn their pay and advanced.

And the lasers of the three ran dry and Tiberius exchanged them for swords.

"Surrender Tiberius," Woo shouted down not wanting Morag harmed.

"I am Tiberius Grant," someone answered and then threw down his sword; while he still lived he could escape another day.

And the fighting stopped but not before the secret of what lay behind the open copper doors had spread about the turtle folk.

Kitchens were turtle folk had their shells prized off for pearl ornaments and the meat on their bones prepared for dinning.

And they hated and resented Woo more and knew by Tiberius's example Woo was not a god, but a man who could be killed.

And rebellious thoughts stirred their minds for scores of Woo's hated bison men and mercenaries lay dead.

The numbers were evening out.

*

The head of Hagar. The head of Hagar having been carried by a bison man had dropped infected pink fungus. And Hagar needed that sick fungus to make oxygen for him and Hagar paled.

And the fungus was eaten by white blind cave roaches that spread the new sickness through the caverns.

Woo might have sold the virus and vaccine to Wayne, but never in his wildest dreams imagined it coming back to Tagget?

For heavens sake why not?

This was his empire, where all he saw was his below and above, nothing could pollute what he saw.

Except Hagar had and many people were getting sick.

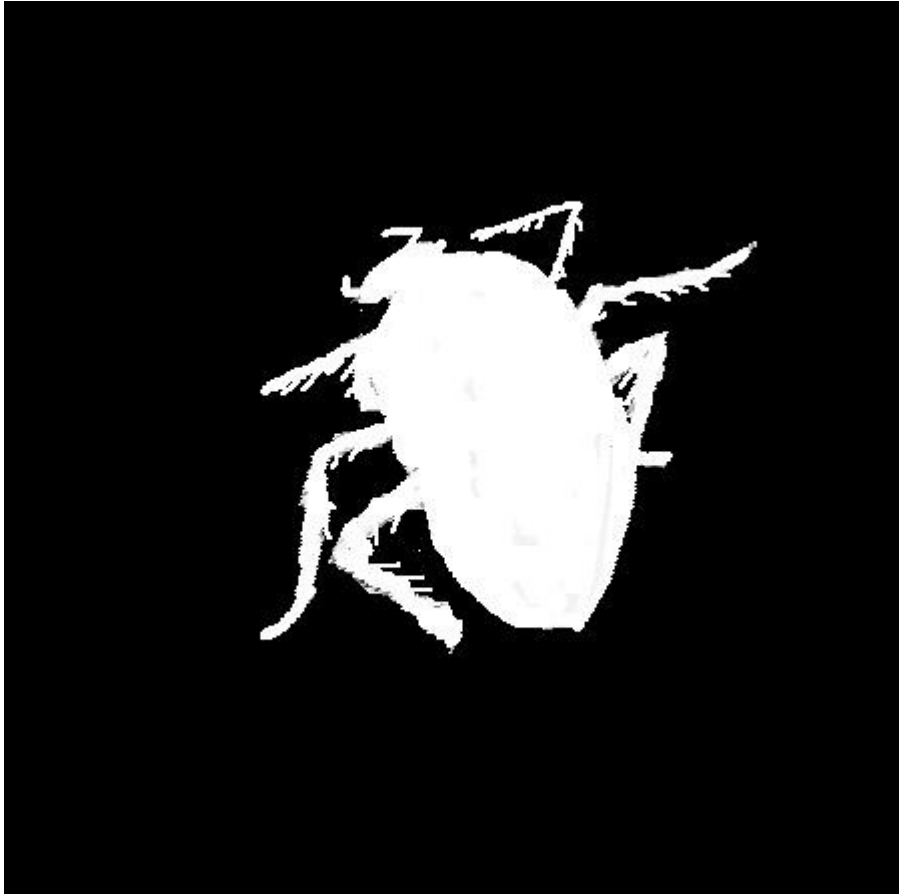


Illustration 154: 3 blind roaches, see how they run?

And because Woo was wrapped up in an imperial dream world neglected his people and they knew he was a god, so why was the god not doing something about the new sickness? And from fear they now feared out of hate; the hate that drives people to kill.

And Philos saw his father and loathed it for it looked ill sitting on a carpet of pink slime.

“Help me I am your father” Hagar pleaded.