

Tiberius

Bonfires

Morag Brown had just been defeated on a motion to pass immediate judgment upon Dracon. The alien ELECT and Conservationists wanted to hear everything.

Wayne was furious, for the second time in his life things hadn't gone the way planned. He felt out of control like when his sister escaped his clutches and now lived in space under a different name.....waiting to expose him or assassinate.....and when he thought of her nights he didn't sleep well. The sister was Maeve, his Achilles heel, his sharks under belly waiting the diver's knife to rip open.

And like the shark would eat his uncoiling empire in efforts to put things right.

And a new species of gray two inch Slater passed under his feet. Unfortunately for it he noticed and ground his left foot upon it bursting it like a ripe tomato.

It was ripe alright, full of the new virus that stuck to the sole of his pink/black striped boots and would give the virus a lift throughout the building and by next week a thousand humans would have died in hospitals; lungs red sponges, eyes yellow puss, organs now cavities of venomous viral spores wanting freedom.

And Wayne's conscious wouldn't be troubled, the virus was meant for his enemies, aliens. And secretaries and cleaners shouldn't have touched anything contaminated anyway?

They would be put down as unfortunate loses.

They came within his 10% of expendables.

Like broken china or typewriters.

Figures on papers.

Not families or single parents.

“Picture nothing but orange sand dunes from horizon to horizon; got that lushness?”

Dracon asked.

Immediately screens showed what he thought.

D.A. Morag Brown smiled at Dracon.

ORANGE

She was making a mistake.

Sand

was allowing pity to creep in towards

YELLOW

this little man she knew was going FRYING.

WHITE

And he was talking his way there and wouldn't

clouds

struggle when the lights went out and the switch that fed the plugs to his splintered wooden chair went down.

He would actually think it funny.

ZENITH.

At least that was merciful.

The black rat below the boards had been joined by two others.

One burst showering everything within a meter with viral spores. The virus swelled you up and then you went

BANG.

A mouse went by; the original rat pounced upon it and ate it up. It didn't know the mouse was sick, it had run across a pile of slime once a roach.

Right now another sick alien ELECT was fighting for his life in a hospital rushed there during recess. Something was eating his purple gills, turning them into pus.

Anyway Dracon continued.....



*32: Anyone got Punch and Judy?*

“As the eight wheeled chariot bus pulled by Taggetian donkeys sped into the Orange Desert Tiberius passed circular burnt patches of blackened sand.

He avoided them out of respect.

“I have never been a superstitious man but I do respect,” he muttered finding comfort in the sound of his own voice.

“A man doesn’t walk on the dead,” I shouted through an open window from where I had been watching the arena.

Then he stopped behind gray granite slabs; had he heard me?

“Should be where I left them,” was he stopping for me?

I hurriedly climbed down the open window and ended up sliding down a drain pipe fast.....ouch.

That was my welcome, he the general and I his army, expected to be whatever he  
thought I was needed as his army?

That's what makes a good sergeant,

AND WAS THE BEST,

Dracon Polanski,

So I was there always.

Well they was here where he left them.....clothes, personal things, claymore, laser  
rifle, grenades, pistol, cartridges, belts, darts.

HE WAS A MAN OF WAR,

Tiberius Grant.

It was times like this when he was giving me a string vest loaded with Miles bombs  
that I remembered mama, "Use swords and you will die by one." But these weren't  
swords mama, they were grenades.

But knew she was right.

Having ten bombs dangling from you makes you want to keep every little bit of your  
person intact.

And the truth hit me why helicopter pilots sit on their helmets.

Quickly I adjusted my tile cod piece.

"Ready?" He asked.

I looked back down the gravel sandy road to that city of reptiles. They put gravel  
on roads or could never see them because of the drifting orange sand. And you know  
who works the gravel quarries? Criminals who have broken their laws.

Thieves with stumps hands used to be, sliced off by sword or on crutches, feet cut off. And speed up the digging by whipping till you drop and more whips and when you don't get up, left.

Isn't going anywhere.

Whip good; ever hear of the thousand cuts, well this is it.

The guards, they know the smell of your oozing blood will bring red ants.

Criminal skeletons litter roads, so do ant nests.



*33: The law was brutal and not based upon King Solomon*

King Hagar's law, sun god law; Historic Trust says they can do it. Well I Sergeant Dracon Polanski says, put the conservationists in them road gangs.

Me and Tiberius, what are we accused of killing?

Murdering barbaric snakes?

Morag so engrossed she forgot to push for sentence.

“Sure,” and some sixth sense told me to leave him and walk home. Home, wherever there was a bar, whore and a kind slate keeper.

SO I FOLLOWED HIM.

AGAIN.

INTERRUPTION. D.A. Morag Brown. “Come on Polanski, are you telling me you follow the general for love?”

Dracon....”Sure why not?”

D.A. Morag Brown “Are you asking us to believe the great Tiberius and his side kick is a couple of gays?”

There was a lot of gasps and chatter amongst the ELECT.

“What? I am talking about friendship between comrades baby!” Dracon disgusted.

And she went over to her desk PC and pressed some buttons; immediately Dracon’s bank accounts flashed across a blue screen monitor.

The letters were in white.

Dracon was amazed he was so rich? He had forgotten....ZENITH again.

“Ahead of us arose a sudden dense black column of oily smoke and the general stopped the chariot bus on the other side of ridge of Taggetian green basalt where a city boundary marker was set.

(The screen showed what he saw.)

He was leaving the city limits and entering the domain of Harkos, Lord of East Field, Minister of Reason and brother to King Hagar.

Tiberius knew what the smoke meant and that we were no longer alone.

“But I am not alone,” Tiberius whispered to his stolen side arms. A jeweled dagger fitting his rank and green velvet handled short sword and canon pistol.

He wore his green general’s uniform Hagar insisted he don for his ritual death. And I was glad because he needed it on before we came to the Cathedral of Sun, for recognition more than anything else from our new friends.....

Our new friends hadn’t really seen us.

But we had seen the color of her money.

“There’s a good cause,” he told me which meant it was a lot easier to kill Taggetians our former employees. “The sun worshipers of Tagget need our help. Guess what Dracon? We are changing sides,” and I knew it made sense for Great King Hagar hadn’t paid us apart from our initial down payment.

Well.

Tiberius peered down the ledge and saw four stakes piled high with oil soaked refuge.

One was burning.

It was a woman, we could see her on fire.

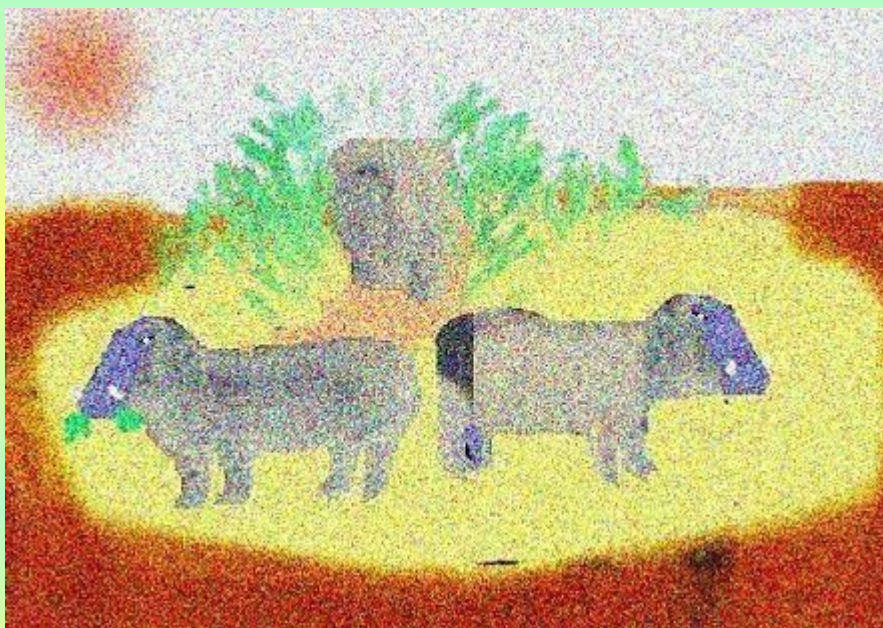
She was screaming something horrid.

The second about to be lit.

An old snake woman.

The third a boy.

The fourth a hooded woman.



*34:Taggetian mosaic featuring Humpbacks*

About a hundred orange desert Humpback shepherds and their families stood by watching covered by Taggetian soldiers manning a heavy quasar machine gun.

You know one of them new guns that bends light around corners? For primitives they were sure as hell learned quick how to work guns the general imported.

Where was I?

Listen and find out!



Three boy soldier drummers beat a roll on tin drums. They must have felt proud standing under their flag of Tagget Canton.

And no humpback shepherd dared move as the fuse leading to the old woman was lit by a Taggetian officer.

Tiberius saw the smoke rapidly cross the sand until it reached the refuge and explode in bright flame.

The old woman screamed.

She burnt quick, being so old and dry anyway and soaked in oil.

Then a 'spinning bird blade' came from the watching humpbacks and took the staked boys head off.

Some close relation sparing the boy a burning death.

Oh yes, a singing bird blade is two rotating blades.....chop chop chop anything.....

.....



*35: Singing in the rain the blades went*

Tiberius looked at the third stake. "About a hundred yards give or take ten," he muttered aiming the canon pistol at the jet propelled open military wagon balloon that

was anchored twenty feet off the ground.

He loaded the weapon with a grenade as the Taggetian officer aimed his imported laser at the gathered shepherds.

“How old was the boy?” The officer asked meaning him at the stake.....

SILENCE.

So shot a girl child and Morag wished someone would do her that favor so she could escape Wayne.....she wanted to weep.....doubts about him were surfacing, she had black and blue welts where he had whipped her good. Maybe power wasn't worth it, but like a lot of women she would return for more under some mistaken idea that she was now owned by a real macho man.

“Six,” someone answered.

The officer shot a man where he kept his race.

Then shot another in the forehead.

A third rushed him so the laser left a hole where all could see daylight pore forth from.

This was war.

The fourth in the heart; a quick death, the officer was getting bored.

“Loaded,” Tiberius grunted.

A fifth man in both eyes for some place different and to be cruel.

The sixth ran and got it in the base of the spine.

The canon grenade pistol, another of the general's imports; screws onto the barrel

of a pistol; gas makes it fly to the target.

And Tiberius fired so the grenade flew fast.

There had been ten soldiers in that balloon.

The green grenade exploded somewhere amongst them.

Bits of this and that fell down upon the orange sand.

Then the radioactive waves ignited the jet fuel and the vehicle went WOSDH bang  
BOOM clatter and was no more but wreckage.

Grenades are nuclear.

And those ten soldiers shouldn't have been so confident they could gloat over the  
killings.

And Tiberius fired again at the quasar machine gun and the grenade missed but  
exploded a yard away.

ENOUGH TO SPLINTER LIFE.

So snake soldiers lying dying with chunks of metal sticking out of them.....WAR  
isn't pretty sight little lady.

Which left just the officer and the drummer boys and being Tiberius the general  
showed himself and shouted

"I am Tiberius Grant."

And advanced down the ledge,

SWAGGERING,

As if he was coming to inspect a parade.

Yes Tiberius lived up to his reputation of swash buckler that evening; sword

fighting was for him.

As Tiberius always imagined himself as some type of later day Errol Flynn; a handsome dare devil now replaced by Harrison Ford and his whip?

The officer knew he was doomed. That was the dragon Tiberius and I think it was only hate for humans that made him stay and fight when Tiberius expected him to run.

As for the shepherds they fell upon the three drummer boys with their wicked ‘wires.’

‘Wires’ lady lawyer is singing wires that are weighted and thrown and hums as it travels to wrap about targets.

Them shepherds like their prey to know death is coming.....those Taggetians are sick.

(Morag knew someone else who was sick. She had a gut feeling Wayne would be noting these new methods of extermination to use on PEOPLE LIKE HER

Her nipples were sore from where he had electrocuted them after his servants had shown Morag the empty elevator shaft.

“What’s done there?” She had asked knowing.

“Hungry mutated vermin to clean up the rubbish,” the staff had answered.

After that Wayne was allowed to use her roughly.

And still muttered “I love you baby, don’t ever leave me, help me baby, you are the only one who can.”

Which meant Morag would stick by him and help cure him.

Some women are like that?

And Morag was afraid now; war was coming to earth possibly or other places. She had cousins living on Pluto 256 Red.

How could Wayne wish these horrors on any human or alien? She took a random guess.....because he didn't have to experience the down to earth fighting, do the bayoneting, see kids get caught in cross fire, see mums and dads collapse with the sight of their dead little people who just wanted to play catch the leader across that Dandy Lion covered field with all them little blue butterflies flying about.

A field littered in anti personal mines good grief.

Oh well, Wayne was just another leader wanting a glittering crystal palace to live in even if it cost the lives of his people to build it.

And the joke was people were willing to build him that palace with their dead kids.

History proves right, Rwanda, Uganda, Biafra, Cambodia, South America..... millions dead because someone wanted a Mercedes, swimming pool, power and bunny girls that go with it.

Dracon's voice filtered to her:

"Cuts real deep lady. Seen it take one of them snake heads off, right through the vertebrae clean as a whistle.

Like a fire sprinkler that red blood was.

Well one little snake drummer he was cut in half. Blue guts, dark liver spill out. Like ox liver it was; real stink too.

One half and half a drum goes one way,

One half and a drum the other way.

Top half still holding drum sticks,

Still beating the drum.

That be him dead.

Guess what your murdering Tiberius does as one drummer still alive?



*36: War demands young drummer boys*

No guess?

Tiberius the dragon says "Let him go," and them humpback shepherds stood there looking at him waiting for which one of them too wire him first, then they did all follow suit.

Well pretty lady, all dirty smelly Sergeant Polanski seeing what's cooking runs

I give one blast at those green basalt rocks. Whole blooming top went up in the sky raining stones.

Those humpbacks stand still.

So Tiberius untangles the wires off his legless mates and Tiberius allows him to escape on the eight wheeled donkey bus chariot.

Well, that officer he knows the shepherds would

So he decides to fight the dragon as it is the only decent thing left for him being an officer to do.

Tiberius begging mercy.

The officer had taken fencing lessons. All troop[s] in Taggetian Canton armies are

drilled in sword play. By gad those copper swords are lethally sharp. I seen a lazy trooper detailed to clean a pink pig and with one blow cut the beast in half.

Everything sprang out and then the P.O.W.'s went in cleaning and skinning.

Well. I'll tell you, the only fencing lessons Tiberius had taken was from old movies as he and his troops watched them in field cinemas.

But tell Tiberius that?

He was the most overconfident man I ever knew. I blame his woman conquests not battle victories. Get defeated in battle, well happens to every general. But chase a pretty skirt failing to get that high?

D.A. Morag Brown was forming opinions about the general and they weren't hostile. She found him interesting, like some historical character resembling Davy Crockett. She would like to meet him, so would the ELECT but for different reasons.

"It was up to the mind to win just as much as skill, and room which Tiberius had plenty for retreating.

And Tiberius was cool and thought out his moves. "I will kill you," was the snake officer's last words as a shepherd threw a desert snake spear into his back.

"Yep," Tiberius agreed for he knew the officer had been the better fencer.

And the humpback shepherds vanished with their two pronged snake spears.

Use them for catching real snakes.

And the forth stake was unoccupied.

The humpbacks had taken her.



“Must be one of them,” Tiberius not caring we didn’t have transport and was stuck in the middle of nowhere with soft orange sand dribbling into our boots because it was that soft in places we was sinking.

I stood next to him wondering how he accomplished what he just did.

Gone and got us killed because we had no water,

NOTHING.

I suppose that’s why he’s the general and I have dirty faded stripes on my fawn uniform.

I shouldn’t have worried for the sound of peeved off donkeys made us look and stare.

There was our bus coming slowly back.

And I had the unpleasant job of stopping the stubborn brutes.

Generals don’t do ting like that.

“Well, I guess our snake friend never made it,” he said dabbing a gloved finger in wet blood splashed on the seats.

He was full of pity for that snake youngster. Hell if them humpbacks hadn’t gone and done him in, we wouldn’t have the bus back.

But the general he doesn’t think like that, he always gets me into scarps and himself out of them. Him escaping all the time makes him overconfident.

That’s him, over confident.

Well I drive us off by promising them donkey’s juicy carrots if they do my bidding while them donkey flies come buzzing and biting me while the general lies flat across the back seats, resting.

Generals need relaxation for all the thinking they do you know?

And them donkeys crapping, pissing and letting off in front of me holding the reins something noisy and stinking the blooming animals they is?

Taggetian donkeys, isn't fir for human consumption. Just grisly muscle; I should know; mind you if there was a Chinese or French take away it might be different? And their fur, hard and used as dart heads dipped in poison by the blow pipe skirmishing platoons or assassins.

"Hallo," the voice came from behind and LO AND BEHOLD there was that missing woman from the fourth stake like a blooming spook.

And our bus

Ploughs into the a sand pit

Spilling me, Dracon through the shattered windscreen.

No soft orange sand for me, just ref Taggetian granite.

"Great and who and want are you?" The general asks.

SHE DIDN'T REPLY.

And me all bruised and the general gawking at her.

"Listen baby," he said pulling a weed smoke from a packet in the glove compartment, "I don't give lifts to any strangers, so talk or walk?"

"The general was always direct with woman; then there was no come back because you showed them your cards up front before you messed with them.

He believed there was heaps of fish in the sea and life was short, even if medical

science allowed you to live as long as you wanted and had cash.

Women and planets were in the same mold to our Tiberius. Places to be explored and then you hated or loved them.

Just like Tagget?

He had a way with women Tiberius did, real blunt her was. Yet he had a string of lovers? What they saw in him I dunno? Maybe it was his ginger mustache or puppy dog gray eyes.

His scarred left jaw about the mouth added character.

“Just let it be said the mighty Tiberius never left a defenseless woman to her burning,” this defenseless woman softly as tears welled up in her black snake eyes.

The snake blood in her veins.

Oh yeah, I forgot, we had learned Taggetian on the voyage out, anyway, but the general didn't mind, she was wearing the remains of this black hugging alligator smock.....head to foot but it still showed she was female. All woman this snake baby and she knew it. She also must have read up on the general to wrap him around her little finger. For someone about to be cremated she sure stunk of perfume, it was overbearing.....like tangerines.

Quote from History of Tiberius, “Great men have strong sex drives. Tiberius was one of them. In gutter slang are called rams by their jealous unsuccessful competitors.”

Tiberius drove on.

Her tears stopped, replaced by a smile, she was with us.

Ten miles later we stopped and went behind a flame tree for a leak; when we returned she was gone.

And suddenly we smelt Flame Tree Flowers behind.

Her perfume.

Smearing herself with flowers; to snakes the flame flower makes men wild with passion.

Not that the general was lacking in that department. But he jumped anyway: battle fatigue.

And he faced her, saw through the grime and smoke stains she was beautiful, in fact a very stunning snake woman.

Somehow we were to fight somebody's dirty little war for nothing.



*37:Flame tree at sunset*

D.A. Morag Brown. “Polanski, you telling me you fight for peanuts?”

The sergeant thought very hard.....Zenith.

“Well I get fringe benefits, get made a hero and the locals give me what I want. All depends on how primitive they are? And if the rest of them sun women looked like her I knew I was on a good thing; and ever seen their gold snake statutes?”

D.A. “What do they give you?”

“Women, gold, that sort of thing.”

D.A. “Thank you Dracon, please continue.”

“Who are you?” Tiberius asked.

She smiled getting in the back seat, “Your new friends are waiting, they wait for me also,” Quote History of Tiberius, “Wilderness people, humpback shepherds and Sun Worshipers were known to be secretive, and even on Hagar’s imported electric dissecting tables.”

Tiberius drove on.

Thirty miles later he saw the copper spires of the Cathedral of the Sun against the flaming horizon as the eight suns set.



38: *It was big*

Taggetian sunset, beautiful, like eight sunsets coming at you from eight places. So that you are completely enveloped in pinks, reds, yellows, anyway.....

“My home,” the snake woman.

“Mine as well I hope,” our general and gives her a disarming smile, and his eyes, they stare into her black orbs and I shiver, trying to remember if the safety is on my pistol hanging at the end of its right shoulder string.

I hoped not, I might need it real quick. He was lucky she understood lust for she smiled or he might have made an enemy of her so that the next couple of times he lusted for her, she did grab his long brown wavy hair to arch his throat back to slit it. Quote the History of Tiberius, “Wilderness folk have a high sense of honor and settle debts real and imaginary with their serrated blades.”

They are like Latin’s on Earth, close families and value the honor of their women,

AND HERE THE GENERAL

FLIRTING WITH ONE.

But Tiberius had not fully read the guide books on the locals. He would soon learn the hard way; he knew he had faithful Dracon Polanski covering his retreating tracks.

And you know what neither me nor the general never went and asked ourselves how come this snake could stay out in the sun so long?

But we were dumb.

The general his senses had died over this gorgeous snake.

Mine over the thought of this poor war we was about to fight.

We both deserved what we got.

And anyway one thing we both learned about Taggetian morals is that they are two faced. It only takes a wink and the snakes are coupling behind some basalt. It is the consequences that lead to blood feuds. These snakes love coupling just like we do but unlike us they have high moral taboos which snakes find impossible to follow.

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Midnight brought us to the edge of a massive clearing and Tiberius saw many cracked roads converging from compass points to the center of a huge Gothic building from whose center arose a stone ziggurat a mile high.

We were impressed.

Gargoyles lined the flight of steps, their eyes rubies, emeralds, diamonds and sapphires.

And I wasn't worried anymore about the general fighting this war for a pair of hot pants.

I had my steel bayonet; those eyes could be prised out.

I also had deep pockets.



*39: A gargoyle*

**Quote History of Tiberius,** “The steps of the Great Sun Ziggurat are made of beaten gold.” I guess Tiberius was thinking along my lines. So the general figured if his new friends could build this they could fight as well. We had had an idea of them as primitive copper age folk living in underground sand caves.

And as Tiberius drove on he was not aware the woman had thrown down her hood, so her long smoked stained blond hair so it flowed in the wind, but others saw recognizing  
and suddenly a thousand humpback shepherds on horned armored orange humpbacks rode out of bunkers hidden in the orange ground.

Talk about camouflage?

And Tiberius drove on knowing nothing else top do apart from touch his weapons reassuringly.



Making him and me smile.

It made me wish too we were back on Middle Kingdom. No way could our donkeys outrun those humpbacks? Ever see a Taggetian Donkey pretty lady?

No.

Like I said tough uneatable eight legged stubborn animals. Evolved from imported Earth insects, how? The Taggetians might lack brains, but learn quickly about cross breeding peas.

(No body in the arena laughed at Dracon's joke and Morag Brown sympathized though, she was a woman.)

Anyway they brought in human geneticists who crossed gened them. Look like hairy slaters with giant brown hairs sticking out of them. Got faces like a donkey though, guess that's why they are called Taggetian Donkeys pretty lady?

D.A. "Thank you for illuminating us Sergeant Polanski?"

"Yes, well those Taggetians eat them. Break the gray shells open, eat legs raw like lobsters, cook the red and white muscles and suck up the soft squelchy insect innards like a spider drinking a fly into a brittle husk.

And explains why a Taggetian fart is lethal.

Gad it should be them savages here on trial not me," Dracon screamed.

An Intergalactic newsman taken off guard allows an unedited version to escape into deep space.

That made Wayne Haslam smile; anti alien favor would rise; thanks of course to Dracon.

And the news man was in sympathy with Dracon coming from a pioneer world and thought like Grand Consul Wayne, “The only good alien was a dead one.”

Yes this man would allow the whole unedited version to escape soon too.

In the twenty first century astronomers said there were 9 BILLION inhabited worlds; and all these millennium later no one still knows:

WHOEVER MADE THEM IS GREAT.

And twenty million were now human inhabited; who said humans weren't rabbits putting pressure on climates to come with foodstuffs. No wonder WHAT MADE THEM FIGHTS BACK with natural disasters? Is nature telling us something important?

Anyway perhaps Wayne would get his dead aliens before too long a wait.

And the newsman wouldn't suffer the same fate as the nurse who inoculated Wayne against The Medic's virus; of course after he had satisfied himself with her his staff would get her as a bonus and when no longer attractive, there was that spare elevator shaft and well fed mutated rats.