

Sample Chapters: Barbarian: The Tale of a Stranger

The term barbarian originated from the ancient Greek word bárbaros, defining a babbler. Its use described people from non-Greek speaking countries who, to Greeks, sounded like they spoke incomprehensible words. Originally denoting a stranger, the term wasn't used with negative denotation until much later.

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Chapter 1: Blueprint Recovery



“Look out!” Leilken shouted,

Jachet flipped around to see a mass of Palionites charging towards them. It was an ugly and unruly hoard- pale faces and broken yellow teeth. They fought for a while now, but their foes only seemed to increase. He counted- maybe ten in this wave? It was only a moment until the mercenaries reached them, and more blood was splattered on the field. He swung his axe, the blade slicing through an enemy’s chest like knife through watermelon. Leilken’s arrows flew around Jachet, knocking down opponents before they had a chance to touch them. He pushed an angry trio toward Leilken with his axe, a fierce arrow, drilling a hole through their heads before shooting out the back and into another Palionite.

Jachet gave him an impressed nodded, “good one.” Now it’s my turn, he thought taking a breath to muster strength. He flung his oversized axe forward. It flicked away from his fingers, slicing clean through several enemies before embedding itself into a burly Palionite man. The man’s body seemed to burst at the impact, like a mosquito full of fresh blood.

“No need to show off,” Leilken rolled his eyes before firing another arrow.

Jachet shrugged before retrieving his axe from its entrenched host.

Relayed to Palios, the second largest planet in their solar system, to retrieve stolen blueprints, Leilken and Jachet found themselves in a small skirmish. Nothing abnormal for the pair. Shioh, formerly one of the king’s warriors, stole blueprints of the palace, planning to sell them to someone on Palios. They did not know to who or why, but they did know he needed to be stopped. Shioh recruited members of the Osmos gang to help him complete his dubious task, mostly using them for protection. But that’s all failed now.

Leilken staggered next to Jachet and heaved, hanging over his knees.

“Tired already?” Jachet teased.

“No,” said Leilken, still hunched over, “Just catching my breath.”

Another wave of Palionites slogged toward the pair, sprinting like death itself was chasing them. A pale-yellow glow from Palios’ sun broke through the gloomy clouds and shined on the battlefield. A steaming metallic taste rose in the air, tainting Jachet’s tastebuds. Four colossal hills surrounded the skirmish, creating an ominous valley. Bodies littered the grassy hills and blood gathered in the valley like a small lake, a literal blood bath.

Jachet gripped his battle-axe. “This is taking too long. Let us finish this.”

With what strength they had left, laden in bronze armor, the two charged towards their enemies. The sun licked Jachet’s back as a storm of arrows zipped past him, scoring his cheek and sending a stream of blood crawling down his face. With ferocity, he swung his axe. For a second, all he could hear was the splintering of bones as his axe decapitated his foe, like shattering glass. Blood sprayed out, coating his already blood-soaked armor. He tasted the warm metal tang on his lip before spitting it on the ground.

Four Palionites surrounded him, malevolent grins on each of their faces. Their yellow eyes sunk into their skulls, matching their dirty yellow teeth. They attacked. Jachet dodged a sword, vaulting back. He counter attacked, swinging his axe and slicing open his opponent’s stomach. Red blood and intestine spilled from the man as he fell to the ground with wide eyes. He convulsed before flopping- still and dead. Another Palionite raced towards him. Jachet jabbed the man in the face with the end of his axe, piercing the man’s skull all the way through- the bloody end of the axe poking out the other side of the man’s head. The man fell backwards, Jachet’s axe still implanted. A large man grabbed Jachet and lifted him off the ground. He gripped him tightly as a shorter Palionite ran towards him, ready to take off his head. Jachet kicked the short one with two feet, pushing him down, using the momentum to flip over his captor.

He locked his arms around the Palionite’s neck and with a quick, brutal motion, snapped it. The man fell with a disheartening thud. The smaller Palionite picked himself up off the ground. He stood in front of Jachet, a bloody dagger in his hand. He slashed, but Jachet dodged his offense with ease. Left. Then, right. Then left again. A frustrated grimace found its way on the man’s face. He went in for the stab but, before the knife could pierce him, Jachet grabbed his

wrist, stopping the knife inches from his chest. He twisted the man's arm backward and punched his shoulder with an open hand, yanking his arm out of socket. The man let out a howl of pain and dropped his dagger to the ground. He punched the man in the stomach twice, before grabbing his head and kneeling him under his jaw, knocking him out, and breaking his teeth.

Heavy footsteps sloshed quickly behind Jachet. Sensing an attack, he leaned back, almost completely horizontal, avoiding a lethal swing of a sword. He stood, swinging one leg out in a 180-degree turn, knocking over his attacker. His opponent fell, losing grip of his sword. Jachet put one knee on the man's chest and leaned over him, pinning him down. He wrapped his hands around the man's neck, strangling him. The man struggled futilely, arms thrashing violently as a look of dread swelled over his face. A few seconds later, he fell limp. Jachet leaned back breathing heavily. He stared at the man, his mouth gapped open and his eyes stared up in eternal suffering. He walked to the lifeless Palionite who still held his entrenched axe. With a slimy gush, the axe came free of the man's head. He looked around him, catching his breath. no more enemies in sight.

Eerie voices groaned around him and the smell of blood was even thicker now. The art of war. He took a breath to steady himself and calmly searched his surroundings. They were very close to Shioh's hiding spot. Just then, a loud rustling suddenly caught his attention. Jachet turned to see a lonely bush shaking uneasily. What a coward, he thought as he silently stalked around the bush. With the element of surprise, Jachet leaped in front of the Palionite, ready to slaughter his rival but froze mid swing. Staring up at him was a child, no older than seven or eight, tears of fear rushing down his face and a gruesome wound in his arm. He bore the weapons and costume of a soldier but was much too young to fight in any battle. He had bright strawberry blonde hair and large splotchy birth mark covering half his face.

"P-please" the boy began pleading to Jachet.

Jachet lowered his axe and knelt in front of boy. He tore the end of his cloak and wrapped the boys wound.

"Hold your hand here," Jachet said placing the boy's small hand over his freshly wrapped wound. He lifted the boy to his feet and wiped away his tears. "Flee," he said to him, "find shelter and stay away from these men."

The boy looked at Jachet for a moment before stumbling away. Halfway up the hill he paused and looked back at Jachet. Then, he vanished into the trees.

“Agh!” a growly voice snuck up on Jachet. A massive Palionite jumped on him, pinning him down to the blood-soaked earth. Jachet’s axe fell out of his hands, just out of reach. The man held a sword to his neck. This Palionite was uglier than most, bearing sickly, pale skin with scaly scars and missing most yellow teeth. He struggled under the weight of his rival, trying to reach his fallen weapon.

“You’ve got moves, boy.” The man spat. “But you ain’t nothing but’a bit of ’nothin.” He lifted his sword preparing to plunge it into Jachet’s chest when a shadowy figure appeared. Suddenly, his rival was lifted off him, like he was floating.

Leilken, Jachet thought with a groan of relief. Leilken pulled the man off Jachet then plunged his knife deep into the man’s chest, an eruption of blood racing out. Jachet pulled himself up and gave his friend a thankful nod. The Palionite tumbled backwards then fell to his knees, breathing shallowly. He let out a small chuckle and spat a mouthful of thick crimson blood on the ground.

“Yous’ kill as many of us as ya want. We’ll get more, we always do.” The man fell flaccid- dead.

“Fall back!” a voice called to all of the remaining Palionites.

Quickly fleeing, the diminished number of thugs disappeared into a distant forest. Jachet watched them flee. He picked up his weapon and gazed around him. The sun was now hidden behind a blockade of angry grey clouds, creating a despondent atmosphere. The open plain was damp with blood and a metallic smell hung in the air along with moans of agony. The battle was won. Jachet dropped to one knee, resting his arm on the other. He lifted his head to the sky, his eyes closed, whispering a prayer for the dead. After every battle he did this- never missing the opportunity to pay his respects and wish the dead a safe journey to the afterlife.

The two warriors hailed from Anamos, a small yet mostly prosperous planet. They wore armor made from burhein, a naturally occurring substance on Anamos that was stronger than titanium but lighter than aluminum. Warriors from Anamos were some of the best in the solar

system. They're well-armed and well trained, known to be swift and strong, whether it was through training or in their DNA, no one knew- or cared.

Leilken's robust beard dripped with sweat and blood, a salty and pungent mixture. "Let us be gone from this place," he said wearily.

Jachet raised his hand, "We are not yet finished here." He sheathed his axe into a sling on his back.

"Aye, let's find him," Leilken said.

The two Anomies trudged to the nearby village, blood and mud coating their boots. People hid in their homes, shutting their windows and locking their doors as the two walked by. A drunk man sat on the ground with a bottle in his hand, leaning against a wall of a small, rundown house. He was sickly skinny, it looked like you could see his heart through his chest. His skin was splotched with leprosy, his tattered clothes hardly creating any cover. The house was probably as old as the man next to it, with grey crumbling stones and a rotten foundation. Jachet approached the man. He kicked the bottle out of his hand, crashing into wall and shattering to pieces.

"Oi," the man shouted, "What the hell you do that fo-" the man was cut off.

"The Anomie, where is he?" Jachet demanded, towering over the drunkard. He wasted no time in getting answers.

"Piss off," the man said, spit flying through missing teeth as he talked.

Jachet picked the man up by his shirt collar and threw him against the wall. "I'll ask you one more time," he said giving him a dramatic shake. "Where is he?"

"He's in the barn, he's hiding in the barn," the man said, frantically, pointing.

Jachet followed the man's finger. An old, abandoned barn sat at the edge of the small village. The red barn was just like the house, rotting and falling apart. He let the man go, letting him fall to the ground before stomping to the barn, Leilken following. He reached the barn doors and pushed on them. Locked. He took a step back from the door and analyzed it, thinking of how to get in. Then, Leilken kicked the barn doors in, the entrance swinging open with a loud

splintering of the wood, breaking the doors. Leilken gave Jachet a pat on the shoulder and walked past him into the barn.

“Not the approach I would have taken,” Jachet said following his friend.

It was dark, only a few rays of sunlight peeking through holes and cracks.

“Shioh,” Leilken shouted out, “show yourself.”

The two men walked sauntered carefully around the barn, looking for the traitor. Piles of hay littered the room, many little critters inhabiting it. All the stall doors were broken if not in pieces and the barn creaked like it would collapse with one of wind. Jachet watched the darkness, waiting for Shioh to move. Minutes went by- nothing happened. Maybe he isn't here. Jachet doubted the trustworthiness of the drunkard. He prowled towards a pile of hay. He paused in front of it and tilted his head. With an irritated sigh, he made his way to the door, but paused. He stood still for a moment as an uneasy silence filled the barn. He looked at Leilken, then over his shoulder- silence. He looked at Leilken again who returned his look with a shrug. Suddenly, a man leaped from the darkness, attacking Leilken to the ground. Jachet ran towards the man, barreling into him. The man grabbed Jachet by the collar of his shirt and pushed him over with his foot, sending Jachet tumbling head-over-heels. The man sprang up into the light, the two warriors looking at him in confusion. He wasn't Shioh.

“Where is Shioh?” Leilken demanded.

“Long gone from here,” the man said.

“Where has he gone?” Jachet asked.

“Wouldn't you like to know,” The man said. He wasn't going to tell them anything.

Jachet took a step toward the man and gripped his axe. A bit of intimidation wouldn't hurt, getting ready to swing at him.

“Jachet,” Leilken's voice stopped him.

He looked over his shoulder at Leilken who stared outside the barn doors. Jachet peered to where he was looking and saw a man running. Shioh. He hurried to the barn doors as he watched Shioh flee. Too far for-

“Too far for you to throw your axe,” Leilken said, interrupting his thought, pulling two arrows from his quiver, and lining it against his bow.

Jachet stepped to the side so Leilken could aim better.

Leilken aimed down his sights, time coming to stop as he held his breath. He felt his heart pause in his chest along with all his organs. He held his breath and everything around him grew silent. He counted in his native language, ol, na, bi- the arrows zipped from his bow. They sliced through the air and hit Shioh- one in his shoulder and the other in his calf. Shioh dropped to the ground. He scrambled to his feet but fell again. A smile spread across Leilken’s face, good shot, he complimented himself. He gave Jachet a hardy pat on the shoulder, walking to Shioh who was attempting to crawl away.

Jachet looked over his shoulder. The mystery man was gone. He is unimportant, he told himself, walking to Shioh.

Leilken lifted Shioh to his feet as though he were a doll, Shioh grunting in pain.

“You thought you were going to get away from us?” Leilken asked rhetorically.

“Where are the blueprints,” Jachet asked. His words were cool and stony, yet it slid from his mouth like honey.

Shioh didn’t say anything. He gripped Leilken’s arm that held him up, staring bewilderedly at them both. Leilken let go of Shioh and let him fall to the ground. Shioh shouted loudly when his injured leg hit the group with a quick snap.

“Should we just kill you now?” said Leilken to Shioh, pulling another arrow to his bow. “They will when we take you back,” he said, “so what’s the point in dead weight.” Leilken raised his bow and aimed it at Shioh’s head.

“Wait, wait,” Shioh said, waving his hand frantically, “In the home near the barn, there’s a drawer in the kitchen.”

“Which house,” Jachet demanded.

Shioh pointed to a small stone house with a faded red tin roof. Jachet made his way to the house with a quick step. The dwelling was practically in the same shape as all the other homes.

He knocked hard on the door before pushing it open. The stony residence revealed a pudgy woman holding an even pudgier baby with a toddler hanging on the end of her dress. The woman raced to close the door on him but Jachet stopped her, pushing it open. The woman stumbled back, staring at him with eyes scrawled in fear. The baby, sensing his mom's fear, began crying. He ignored them both, walking into the house, his feet kicking up dust as he entered. The house was small, only the size of a big room. A curtain separated the kitchen from their living space.

Jachet began pulling open drawers and shuffling through its contents, one after the other until he saw it. He let out a small sigh of relief, as his fingers brushed the folded blueprints. He unfolded them, staring at them, satisfied they could finally go home. He looked up from the prints, his eyes locking onto a third child. A young boy stood by the kitchen table watching him closely. He had an uncanny resemblance to the boy he spared on the battlefield. Brothers maybe. Jachet looked at the child for a moment then, back at the blueprints. You caused a lot of trouble, he scolded the blueprints in his mind.

Jachet made his way to the door, the blueprints tight in his grip.

"He promised to help us," the woman spoke in small voice.

Jachet paused and looked over his shoulder at the woman. He could hear her desperateness. He understood. These rural Palionite villages were all but forgotten. No one cared about the people here. "I'm sorry," he said to her. A moment passed. He left the family behind, making his way to Leilken.

"Do you have them?" Leilken asked as Jachet approached.

"Aye, let's go." He said, already entering the coordinates home into his transporter.

Leilken unhooked a small grey clip from his transporter and attached it to Shioh's shirt. He pressed a few buttons and then, with a nod at Jachet, pressed the red button, dissipating back home. Jachet looked out at the field where they fought. A breeze whipped past his face, bringing the smell of blood with it. It tickled his nose even now. He pushed the red button, negative thoughts running through his mind. All these lives wasted for someone else's greed.

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“Please, please,” Shioh sputtered as he was dragged away by the king’s warriors.¹ “I’ll do anything,” his voice faded to silence as the double doors swept closed.

Leilken gave Jachet a slap on the shoulder. “Why the long face, Jachet,” he said as they exited the palace court room. “We caught Shioh and got the plans. It’s been *three* rotations² and we’re finally home.” While Jachet’s stoic and quiet demeanor was normal for him, Leilken could always tell when something was wrong.

He followed Leilken. He said very little since they got back. It was nice to be home, but battle was never easy for him. “Aye, it was a success.”

Leilken paused as they reached the palace courtyard. The large fence entrapped the palace gardens, perfectly trimmed bushes and flowers created a perfectly symmetrical pattern of purples, blues, and whites. The sun was a grey spot in the sky, hidden by the fog. Droplets of rain pattered the two warriors- the typical weather of Anamos. When it wasn’t rainy and muddy, the wind was blowing dirt, creating dust storms. Leilken shoved his fluffy, curly hair into a bun on the top of his head. He closed his eyes and looked up at the sky, letting the rain wash the dirt from his face.

“How can you not enjoy this, brother,” Leilken said to Jachet, throwing his hands up in victory.

Jachet put up his hood, covering himself from the rain. “People died over that. Something some simple.”

“Over rain?” Leilken said, looking at Jachet.

The rain rolled off Jachet’s poncho, dripping from the front of his hood onto his nose. “So much blood was spilled over blueprints. All of this could have been avoided,” Jachet said, wiping rain drops from his nose.

¹ King’s Warrior: A specially trained warrior who work directly under the king. This a noble status and can only be given by the king himself. These warriors deal with situations directly relating to the King, Palace, or courts.

² Rotation: length of 41 days, about a month.

“People die every day. It’s a price to pay,” Leilken said as he walked to the warrior’s temple.³ “Let it go or it will haunt you forever.”

Jachet followed him. he’s right I need to let it go, he told himself. He didn’t always feel this way, but some missions really pushed him into brooding thoughts.

The two Anomies plodded wearily down the road, passing through the market. Though the two were not brothers by blood, they were brothers in every other sense of the word. Ever since they met in the alleys, the two were inseparable. They had comparable handsome faces and shared an athletic frame, although Leilken was taller and huskier. Leilken almost always kept his lengthy almond brown hair up in a dense bun on top of his head. When it was out, it swept to his mid-back. A scar curved its way from his left eyebrow to the center of his rosy cheek and another scar created a small ‘x’ to the lower right of his left eye. He had light pink lips and a bony nose that protruded angrily from his face with light green eyes and freckly cream skin. His grand, bushy eyebrows and harsh, unruly, beard matched his vivacious attitude- an attitude not easily stifled.

Jachet was a bit shorter than the average Anomie- but it only made him faster. His wavy, russet brown hair was kept half up with a small ponytail while the other half fell to his shoulders with stubborn hair around the crown of his head curving carefully around his face. Small, thin, scars dotted his dark caramel skin from a flogging he received as a child. Extremely rare amongst Anomies, Jachet had two different colored eyes. His right eye was olive green, and his left eye was chestnut brown. Both eyes slightly tilted towards his round, button nose and followed out toward his sharp cheek bones. Contrary to his friend, his quiet and composed spirit matched his stoic expressions, seldom revealing passion, excitement, or sentiment.

“Maybe korskni,⁴” Leilken continued about what he was going to eat when they got back to the barracks. They could get practically any dish they wanted from the mess hall at the warrior’s temple but Leilken preferred the simpler things in life.

³ Warrior’s Temple: the area where warriors live. This includes the training arena, sleeping quarters, mess hall, medical hall, and temple.

⁴ Korskni: traditional anomie dish consisting of rice and whatever vegetables and meat were available, sometimes mixed with soup or broth.

“Or maybe-” Leilken was cut off by an angry shriek.

“Thief!” the voice said.

The two turned to see a homeless woman being caught stealing from a fruit merchant.

“I’ll have you flogged in the streets, you filthy leavel!”⁵ said the vendor grabbing the woman violently. He threw her to the ground and kicked her.

“We ought not to get tied up in that.” Leilken said turning away. Jachet watched, his eyes narrowed on the vendor. He took a step in their direction, thinking to help woman, but was stopped by Leilken.

“Jachet,” Leilken called to him, getting his attention.

Jachet watched the vendor kicked the woman. She coughed, vomiting onto the ground. He turned abruptly to face Leilken, walking past him.

Leilken hurried to his side, “it’s not your problem, Jachet. Don’t get tied into things that aren’t your business, even if it’s to help someone.” These words he and Leilken always lived by, especially as alley kids.

He didn’t look at him, simply acknowledged him, “right.”

“You don’t always have to stand up for the little guy,” He said.

“Why not?” he retorted, “that was us before, was it not?”

He sighed, “I’m not talking to you about this.”

Jachet scoffed at him.

“Oi,” Leilken said sharply, stopping in place and putting his hands on his hips.

He narrowed his eyebrows at him, crossing his arms over his chest. “Do you want Korskni or not?”

⁵ Leavel: derogatory word meaning trash or garbage in ancient Anomie language.

He shook his head, hiding his smile. He threw a tough arm around Jachet's neck. "You leavel."

"Keep your hands off me, you bastard," He shrugged his friend off.

He tsked. "Oh, don't pout."

Jachet looked at him with narrowed eyes, piercing him like a dagger to the heart. "I'm *not* pouting."

Leilken grasped his cheek with a fat thumb and squeezed. "You're definitely pouting," he teased him.

Jachet shook his head with a chuckle, "let's just go."

As the fog began to lift, they could see the temple. It was a massive building, sculptures hanging on each corner of the pagoda designed building. The building was several miles long and a few stories high. It was surrounded by a tall black gate and the entrance had large sprawling gates. The outside of the temple was meticulously designed opposed to the bare inside.

"That's not at all how it works," Jachet said exasperatedly, leading an entirely new conversation.

"It is when I do it," Leilken threw his hands up.

"There you two are," came a new voice. Olmno their mentor and good friend greeted them at the entrance. "I heard you both a mile away."

Leilken put an hand on Olmno's shoulder, "you've aged since we've been gone, old man," he joked.

Jachet gave Olmno a courteous bow.

Olmno sighed, "Jachet, always well-mannered and Leilken, still a bastard. Nothings changed."

"Not the word I'd use." Leilken said with a big smile on his face.

"It is definitely the word I'd use," Jachet shrugged.

“Oi-” Leilken began.

“We haven’t the time for your banter.” Olmno waved them on as they entered the temple. Olmno’s old body held up well over the years. His wrinkly skin stuck to his bones and long facial hair hung like whisker on his face. His wooden brown eye’s gleamed with wisdom and though he aged over the many years, he was still the same man they met in the alley all that time ago.

“We just got back from a three-rotation mission,” Leilken said, “We’ve all the time to banter.”

“Yes, you’ve been gone for quite a while. There’s news you missed.” Olmno said.

“News?” Jachet said, a somber expression on his face.

“Yes, after you eat and clean up, meet me in the temple.” Olmno said sauntering away. “Something bad is happening.”

Chapter 2: Life of a Briht



20 Years Earlier

Moonlight wandered aimlessly around the grey, dull alley, softly reflecting off the dumpsters. Each dumpster was overflowing with vile filth of all kinds- molding foods and carcasses alike, providing a home for the rats and food for the homeless. The ugly weather of Anamos failed to persist into the night. The rain stopped and the dense, cake-like mud was slowly turning back into dust of dirt and gravel. The narrow alley manifested a sour odor of mold, dirt, and piss, leaving a stingy taste in the mouth of anyone who walked by- though very few ever walked by.

This alley was not well inhabited like the other alleys. Only the lowest of vagrants lived on this side of town. Most Anomies refer to these vagrants as brihts. Though it is derogatory, it summed up a homeless Anomie well- unwanted and useless. Leilken, a young briht himself, laid on the damp, flat ground, dark crimson blood falling from his face. His weak childish body posed no threat to the older bullies that were beating him around.

“You filthy briht,” spat the largest of bullies. He kicked Leilken in the side and an eruption of mocking laughter broke out.

Leilken rolled over on his side with a groan of pain, spitting blood onto the ground, creating a murky mixture in the dirt. The sound of a trash can lid being tossed to the ground averted the bullies’ attention to a battered Jachet. Clambering ungracefully out of the trash can he was tossed into, he staggered intently to his cudgeled friend, placing himself steadfastly between Leilken and the older boys.

“You’re not done taking a beating?” said the bully.

Jachet looked up at the bully. Both of his eyes were black, nearly swollen shut, and his lip was swelled and blistered.

“Heh, here we go again boy-” The bully’s words were broken midsentence.

“Aye!” a voice hollered down the alley, “What are you chie⁶ doing?” said an Anomie, hustling towards them. Instantly each aggressor took off, disappearing with the chilly night breeze.

Jachet pulled Leilken to his feet, placing a supportive arm around him.

The Anomie came to a halt in front of them. Taking the end of his sweater, he knelt and wiped at the blood on Leilken’s face. “Where is your home?” he asked them.

Neither of the boys answered.

“My name is Olmno,” he said to them.

Still no response.

The man, Olmno, looked at the alleyway kids. They both wore tattered clothes and their toes poked through holes in their shoes. A sour smell hovered over them and their hair grew riotously on their head. They were obviously homeless, probably living in the alleys for most of their life. His heart grew heavy in his chest, an incessant feeling of compassion washed over him. He stood, “Follow me,” he said walking away.

The two boys hesitated, taking a shameful shuffle back. The sooner they could get away and hide, the better.

Olmno frowned, “right,” he said, placing a thoughtful hand on his chin. “Alley kids don’t trust anyone.” He sat on the smelly alley ground and swung his bag from his shoulders. He lifted the flap of his bag and pulled from it a small black pouch; its contents hidden. “How long have you two been here,” he asked, opening the black pouch and popping a small pellet in his mouth.

Food? Jachet thought, but those are way too small to feed anyone.

Leilken stepped forward, stumbling slightly, “is that food,” he asked.

Olmno tipped the bag and two pellets plopped onto his hand. He held it out, “eat just one.”

⁶ Chie: child, young person

Leilken hobbled up to Olmno and snatched it up, his hunger overcoming his judgment. Jachet shuffled up behind him, peering over his shoulder. He handed a pellet to Jachet and popped the other one in his mouth. He chomped it up and swallowed it down, his face contorting into a grimace of disgust.

“That tasted awful,” he said, wrinkling his nose into a frown.

“But,” Olmno lifted a finger, “are you hungry?”

Leilken squinted, focusing hard. Then his eyebrows lifted, “I’m not,” he said, unable to hide the shock in his voice.

Olmno looked at Jachet, giving him a nod, encouraging him to eat the pellet. Jachet looked down at the pellet. It was the size of a pebble and the color of dirt. He frowned, unimpressed with the lackluster. *I’m supposed to eat this?* Jachet felt an arm nudge him.

“Come on,” Leilken said.

Jachet looked down at the pellet before tossing it in his mouth begrudgingly. He chewed it cautiously. The bitterness of the pellet stinging his tastebuds. He frowned at the taste and quickly swallowed the pellet, sticking his tongue out in disgust.

“These are what warriors eat while on missions,” Olmno said, sticking the pouch into his bag. “They have all the nutrition one needs, but not the flavor,” he chuckled.

“You’re a,” Jachet hesitated, “warrior?” He spoke in a quiet voice.

“Aye,” he confirmed.

Jachet’s eyes sparkled at the man. Wow, a real-life warrior.

“We’re going to be warriors one day,” Leilken said lifting his head proudly.

“Is that so?” Olmno said.

“That’s right,” Leilken responded, with a curt nod.

Olmno looked at Jachet for his response.

Jachet looked shyly down at his toes, avoiding his gaze.

“We’ve both been here ever since leaving the orphanage,” Leilken answered Olmno’s original question, “in the alleys.”

He tilted his head back slightly in thought, “you two are brothers?”

“No,” Leilken answered, shaking his head. “We’re best friends,” he said throwing his arm around Jachet’s neck proudly.

Olmno looked at the two. “You missed the meaning of the word, chie.” He said, straightening up. “Brothers don’t need to be related by blood, but by spirit.”

Jachet stared up at him, mesmerized by his warrior prowess.

“You two *are* brothers,” Olmno said, turning his back to them and staring up at the moon. “You two have each other.” He looked over his shoulder at them, “take care of each other.” He walked to the end of the alley and paused, a gentle breeze followed him, trailing pass Jachet and Leilken. “Are you two coming or not?” He called, “you said you wanted to be warriors, didn’t you?”

Chapter 3: The Separation



“How long have warriors been going missing?” Leilken asked, fingering through the file.

“Two rotations, seventy-three warriors.” Olmno said, leaning against the wall.

“Seventeen declared dead. After a few days, they stop checking in and their light never comes back on.”

“Dropping like flies,” Leilken said.

“If it continues at this rate, our military will be depleted in only a few sempts.⁷” Olmno couldn’t hide the worry from his voice.

“Any developments so far?” Jachet said, yet to open his file.

“A few links to the slave trade and some gang related matters, but nothing solid.”

“Solo assignments,” Leilken said.

“Ay,” Olmno said hesitantly, “we’re stretched thin right now.”

“I haven’t had a solo assignment in ages,” he murmured.

Jachet frowned as he finally opened his file, “government developing assistance,” he read the page. “Since when do warriors provide government developing assistance?”

Olmno leaned against a wooden beam in the room with a heavy sigh, “since System Sevens Treaty,” he said. “It unites Az, Palios, Anamos, Serepah, Aeriou, Gigantas, and Orr and requires that we all provide assistance to each other.” Since the Great Galactic wars, many planets found themselves struggling through recessions, dealing with gangs and power vacuums. “You missed the lecture on it,” Olmno continued, “but this is to make up for the damage we’ve done.”

⁷ Sempt: Eight rotations, about a year.

Jachet lifted an eyebrow in dissatisfaction before dropping the file on the table. "I should be working with Leilken with the missing warriors."

"We're trying to keep peace in the system, Jachet, just go along with it for now," Olmno said, "You'll be putting down some freedom fighters- the Bruquet."

Jachet held his breath. It wasn't like him to disobey orders, but this was absurd.

"This mission is more important than you realize."

Leilken hesitated, "Olmno," he said quietly, "solo mission?"

Olmno stretched his back and yawned quietly. "Aye, I trust the two of you can handle it," He said as he walked out of the room, no longer entertaining their objections.

"My mission starts immediately," Leilken said, "going to Orr, to investigate the disappearance of Anomie warriors," he read from the paper as the two walked out of the room.

"Sounds like you might be gone for a while," Jachet said.

"A bit," Leilken said, "and you?"

"To Serepah," Jachet sighed.

A laugh escaped Leilken's throat. He gave Jachet a pretentious pat on the shoulder, "good luck." Serepahs were known for their over-zealous and fiery personalities- difficult for anyone to get along with. They made their way to departures.

"Mine at least doesn't start for a few days," Jachet said.

Leilken picked a bag from the wall and checked the contents of it before swinging it over his shoulder. Departures had ready-made bags, containing everything they need, rations, first-aid, extra clothes, and most importantly the transporter. He wrestled the transporter from the bag and entered in the coordinates from the file- the coordinates to Orr. He put a sincere hand Jachet's shoulder, "take care of yourself while I'm gone."

He nodded at him, "and you."

Leilken looked at him, a glimmer of sorrow in his eye.

Jachet returned the look. It had been sempts since they've been apart. A draft gently blew between Jachet and Leilken, wrapping itself gently around their necks as the room filled with silence.

Leilken shook his shoulder surely before pulling him in for a hug. "Try to have a bit of fun while I'm gone." He said, his boisterous smile returning to his face.

"Aye," Jachet said, "don't do anything stupid," he said, crossing his arms and leaning against a nearby wall.

Leilken pressed the red button on his transporter, slowly dissipating. "Me? Do something stupid?" His rowdy smile spread across his face, "never."