

NOVEL IN ENGLISH VERSION

ARKAIOS

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SCIENCE-FICTION

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Arkaïos

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Cover photo by JC Rolan.

A translation from the French novel: Les routes oubliées d'Arkaïos by JC Rolan. Editions Librinova.

At the end: a glossary for those, who would like to know more.

The names: CELQUORG – S E T O – TRAMPAS – FORGES OF MÉTACASSAR, as well as the names of the characters and planets are registered.

Chapter 1

The alien traveller.

Now, that he was back home, on his planet: the Earth - at least he liked to believe that he belonged well to this world - he was looking at events in his near past with new lucidity and, what he saw gave him a retrospective fears such as when one considers the fatal accident which one escaped. And today he was finishing a journey in which any thinking being could have shaken with fear without shame.

He was the last representative of a world died out in the human mind since age-old times. Some who knew him and knew where he came from, did not hesitate to say of him that he was a legend and, all in all, it could be an accurate view of his condition if he had the pretension to put it forward.

What he had seen, what he had known; wonders and honours, - and many other more terrible episodes -, no one among his contemporaries had made the experiment of it and will never make it, for the excellent reason that all these people had disappeared for such long time that it was impossible to know the time which separated them from him.

So much adventures, so much turnaround, more surprising the ones than the others, had disrupted his life, since he had come back in the universe of the living, that sometimes, he doubted his identity.

For everyone, he was known as Michael A Paladin the fourth¹ and now, when he had just learned the meaning of the A, placed between his first name and his name, each having seven letters, he realized that this discovery put him in the heart of human mythologies.....

* * *

At that time...

The Scramasaxe 701² was a ship of the last generation of the Cor Caroli Sphere Universe's³ cruisers. She was as long as K2⁴ was high and more majestic than any other starship belonging to known civilisations, like the plump but unsightly vessels of Ursa Major Cosmos, or those massive, with their all sharp-edged angles contours of the Artio Structure System⁵.

There was no doubt, about it; the Scramasaxe 701 was an extraordinary starship. She was inclined to go across space, firmly set on a frame whose building had needed the exploitation of the several planets subsoil to extract of them resources of rare metals.

Above the poop, the housing fortress soared upwards its forty fives levels towards of the stellar void.

The five hundred technicians of the crew, - all engineer of high level -, lived in the two last levels, right under the navigation bridge where the captain Djam Djélén reigned with the steadfast authority that a nomination at such prestigious command post conferred to him.

He belonged to the former generation of officers, formed at the time of the war, which led to the colonization of the Saral Téquesquän system. It was said of him, that he was a spinal tempered steel column supporting thirty years of rigid military education.

He had the quirk, unpleasant enough for the crew, to move with his aide-de-camp carrying a silver plate on which was laid out a white cloth anti-static, intended to detect the least piece of impurity on a table, an armchair, a cupboard, or any other furniture on his way.

Twenty-eight levels were attributed to the five hundred Trampas⁶ of the shock battalion. These top soldiers belonged to the Forges of Métacassar. The mythical base where were conceived, programmed, brought up and trained all Trampas was organised to ensure the safety of the Cor Caroli Sphere Universe.

Nobody did know its position in space.

Trampas's life cells occupied two levels.

The twenty-six levels lower were converted in training camp to fight. They allowed, thanks to an atomic modelling of the inside structure of the starship to change this area in operational zone where could be created all the possible conflicts, on all the conceivable lands. Thus, for most of the standard day of the board could lead a Trampas from an icy world to a scorching world, via a planet without oxygen.

No respite was given to a Trampas; he had to learn how to survive in any adverse conditions. This non-stop training made these men invincible warriors.

The layout of the Scramasaxe 701 did not satisfy the ethnologists, biologists, geologists, astronomers, phrenologists, because they have just five levels to make the storage of the samples collected by them on various planets. And this exploration trip started five standards years ago had produced a consequent harvest. There were rare geological specimens including an exuberant flora and

many odd animals on which several generations of biologists would use their sapience to define their kind and nature.

All the conceivable type of air could be recreated to provide for the survival of the brought back species of worlds where no man could have survived without the supplement of appropriate equipment.

The last ten levels were used as hold for food, and various equipment, intended to maintain the good running of such impressive starship.

Since the bridge, to the top of the housing fortress, the captain Djam Djélén had a general view of his ship, organised around two cylindrical and straight hulls.

They were built with a great number of constructions of various dimensions and shapes, from the simple pipe to the complex and overgrowing installations. They linked each point of the starship and looked like two great connecting ways, and so, they were, because shuttles moved without stopping to carry the members of crew to their working station.

Big antennas, with multiple forms, drawn out of the prow to the sidereal vastness changed the Scramasaxe 701 in a giant insect, escaped of an unknown corner of the universe.

Few lights lit the starship. The abyssal darkness of space wrapped its hull, drowning in darkness the innumerable forms, which moulded it.

In the centre of the Scramasaxe 701, a first crown, whose diameter was about the quarter of its length, held the most powerful energy source worked out by a human civilisation to propel a starship.

On all the circumference of its inside volume, under a cyclopean vault, several ways, set on many levels, allowed the run of maintenance and surveillance vehicles.

Lower on the floor, was a debauchery of protruding assemblages of angled, straight, angular pipes, which disappeared into wells which had been said to be bottomless and came out elsewhere, at the centre of depressions which seemed to have been dug by hands of titans.

And there, set on multilevel escarpments, stood like massive monoliths, erected by a people enamoured of grandeur and mysticism, the creation's modules of the antimatter bubbles, which bended space and time to propel the ship towards so remote and unexplored frontiers, that rare were the beings and machines, which had flown so far.

This crown, like that of all the Cor Caroli starships like the Scramasaxe 701, - and they were exactly thousand two hundred and thirty-four in the mighty fleet

of war of the Sphere Universe -, deserved well the majestic name of space-time cathedral, which the crew gave her. It was their survival and their only means of going back to their starting base.

A second annular module, of a dimension hardly smaller than the first, took up the prow of the Scramasaxe 701. It was fitted out with a formidable weapons system whose battery and instruments of adjustments covered the floor and the walls. It assured the offensive and defensive capacity of the Scramasaxe 701 and, without boastfulness, the designer of the ship affirmed that it would destroy a world without worrying, the least, the starship itself.

The degree in the sophistication of the Scramasaxe 701 was so high that the possibility of a breakdown during space-time navigation, even due to human error would be considered both improbable and unconceivable, especially by the engineers and builders who have designed the hull and developed the propulsion, energy and the system's control.

However, this day...

The long hoot of alarms triggered simultaneously all over, from the hold to the bridge of command, while the giant cruiser had been travelling now for one month in space-time.

In the space-time cathedral, an incident affected the creation's modules of the antimatter bubbles.

The crew was informed in the second of the breakdown origin. They were astonished when they heard the new but after a short time, everyone faced the situation without panic, thanks to a great professionalism but also due to a mind conditioning in training incubators.

Everyone applied at once safety measures that were required of him.

Trampas cut themselves off in their quarters and slipped on their protective battledresses.

In a few minutes, the energy production reached a critical level. The life expectancy of the Scramasaxe 701 was reduced and reached the point beyond which her would be destroyed inside the temporal slide zone.

Under the dome of the command bridge, the captain Djam Djélén looked with a sharp eye the navigation data displayed by Celquorg⁷ on several screens.

Without the hint of a movement; parsimonious in his words, uttering only his comments in short sentences; immovable like a T, which does not bend under its horizontal line, Djam Djélén sized up the situation almost as quickly as Celquorg. He gave the right order at the right moment without worrying about the Celquorg calculation.

The three navigation officers awaited his orders quietly behind their surveillance and control consoles, on the command bridge. Their fingers run up and down sensitive screens, along abstruse symbols. They had the certitude that their captain, helped by Celquorg, would make the decision, which would save the cruiser of the disaster.

The tension, roused by the incongruity of the situation was channelled by this permanent trait, specific to the men of action, who are afraid after and not before the fight. There were not four on the bridge, counting the captain Djam Djélén, but one; single and singular mind in perfect communion with the Scramasaxe 701, ready to face the finality maybe fatal of the manoeuvre.

Ten metres, below the bridge, Celquorg continued to manage the life of the starship, by taking care of its safeguard.

He was a complex mind, at the borders of independence and freedom, but that a thin wire and relentless, in the shape of only one “on-off” switch, kept under man's thumb.

The captain Djam Djélén initiating the manoeuvre to come the Scramasaxe 701 out from the space-time slide back to the standard time.

A wild vibration ran along the starship. Then several jerks followed, like if, suddenly fitted out with wheels, the Scramasaxe 701 ran on a corrugated surface.

The violence of the manoeuvre disrupted for the first time the assurance of the crew, little accustomed to a rescue operation.

The sirens hooted in the gangways to inform the crew of the transfer's phase to standard space. Everyone put his helmet, used to isolate the head and the eyes from the dazzling flash, which lit the inside of the cruiser during the great passage.

In the year eight of the new Tantas Nesos laws of the Corrobo era, the Scramasaxe 701, preceded and followed by the twelve-space fight spheres, which protected her, emerged out the space-time.

She was near a black giant planet, in a system not indexed in the twenty-fourth unexplored circle of the Torquil Belle galaxy. Her appearance in visible space produced an intense flash of light that lit up, a short time, the dark surface of the planet.

The Scramasaxe 701 stayed motionless in the abyssal void.

Celquorg recorded the spatial coordinates and gave the new planetary system the name of Djam Djélén III, because it was the captain's privilege to leave his name to posterity - at least human - when he explored an unknown area so far, and for the captain Djam Djélén, it was the third. No one would ever dispute its

authorship in the human universe, not even the enemies of the Cor Caroli sphere universe because the data was recorded by a Celquorg and what a Celquorg recorded was becoming an established fact everywhere in the universe known from humans.

The crew members, relieved from the unpleasant constraint of a disappearance in the spatio-temporal slide, were waiting for the orders by constructing, each of possible scenarios on the incredible failure that had just affected the Scamasaxe 701.

The captain Djam Djélén himself did not work out any theory. The starship was safe now; it was the essential point for him. Celquorg would inform him at the appropriate time of the reasons for alarm.

In the first space-time voyages, very few captains had been likely to find the suitable manoeuvre for a breakdown during the spatio temporal transfer and many damaged starships must be wandering in time limbs where no one alive had its place.

Djam Djélén did not await a long time the results of the investigation conducted by Celquorg. A three-dimensional representation of the officer in charge of the crown of energy materialised on the bridge, to three respectful steps from the captain Djam Djélén.

— Well Mr Straykuipehr; what happened?

— A breakdown impossible to understand for time being, sir! It caused a sudden failure in the cooling line on the third level of operation. Celquorg took control of the situation, in two seconds standard, which followed the incident. It's an exceptional reaction for this kind of problem, even for a system as sophisticated as a Celquorg. It looked as though he knew when and how to step in. If he had not told me otherwise, I would have thought of a sabotage. But without his swift rescue, we would have been destroyed before even being able to react.

— And which reasons does he provide?

— He does not give us any answer for the moment, sir. He insists he wants to carry the repair operations on his own.

— Damn mechanic! said Djam Djélén by using one of these old expressions that he liked and, which, in general, agreed rather well to the situations. How long repairs will pull up us, Mr Straykuipehr?

— One day and two hours, sir.

Djam Djélén thanked him for his report and the three-dimensional hologram of the officer dematerialised after a strict salute.