

THE COMPLETE
A L I E N STM
OMNIBUS

VOLUME 1



EARTH HIVE
NIGHTMARE ASYLUM
THE FEMALE WAR

Contents

Cover

Also Available from Titan Books

Title Page

Copyright

Aliens™ Book I: Earth Hive

Dedication

Epigraph

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25
26
27
28
29
30

Aliens™ Book II: Nightmare Asylum

Dedication

Epigraph

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

26

27

28

29

30

Aliens™ Book III: The Female War

Dedication

Epigraph

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30

[About the Authors](#)

[Also Available from Titan Books](#)

THE COMPLETE ALIENS™ OMNIBUS

VOLUME 2 (JUNE 2016)

VOLUME 3 (DECEMBER 2016)

VOLUME 4 (JUNE 2017)

VOLUME 5 (DECEMBER 2017)

VOLUME 6 (JUNE 2018)

VOLUME 7 (DECEMBER 2018)

THE OFFICIAL MOVIE NOVELIZATIONS

ALIEN™

ALIENS

ALIEN3

ALIEN RESURRECTION

ALIEN

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

SEA OF SORROWS

RIVER OF PAIN

THE RAGE WAR

PREDATOR: INCURSION

ALIEN: INVASION (APRIL 2016)

ALIEN VS. PREDATOR: ARMAGEDDON (SEPTEMBER 2016)

THE COMPLETE
A L I E N S[™]
OMNIBUS

**STEVE PERRY AND
STEPHANI PERRY**

TITAN BOOKS

The Complete Aliens Omnibus: Volume 1

Print edition ISBN: 9781783299010

E-book edition ISBN: 9781783299027

Published by Titan Books
A division of Titan Publishing Group Ltd
144 Southwark Street, London SE1 0UP

First edition: December 2015

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental. The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

™ & © 1986, 2015 Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.
All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Did you enjoy this book?

We love to hear from our readers. Please email us at readerfeedback@titanemail.com or write to us at Reader Feedback at the above address.

To receive advance information, news, competitions, and exclusive offers online, please sign up for the Titan newsletter on our website www.titanbooks.com

ALIENS™

BOOK I

EARTH HIVE

STEVE PERRY

For Dianne, one more time; and for Pat Dupre, former harpist
with the Denver Symphony, who saved my soul in Baton Rouge
during the hippy autumn of 1970

“Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill...”

William Golding, *Lord of the Flies*

Even inside her bulky E-suit, Billie could feel the cold night bite at her. Sure, the land crawler blocked most of the icy wind, and they had pulled one of the crawler's portable heaters and turned it up full, pretending it was a campfire, but it was still cold. It was the best they could do—there wasn't any wood on the planet Ferro, and if there had been they sure as shit wouldn't be *burning* it. Wood was worth more per gram than platinum on this world. How the guys in the vids could chop it up and waste it was unreal.

The frozen wind howled like some kind of unhappy beast as it blew past the squat form of the crawler; the song changed to a whistle where it flowed over the tractor's sharp treads. The sounds were eerie. Every now and then through a patchy break in the roiling and thick clouds, the stars gleamed briefly, hard pinpricks against a dead-black curtain, glittering like diamonds caught in a laser beam. Even without the clouds it would have been dim; Ferro had no moons.

Well, right, so it wasn't comfortable out here, but at least the three of them weren't stuck inside the colony with the do-nothing dweebs, bored half stupid.

"Okay," Mag said, "what else we s'posed to do here? We ate the RTE rations and sang that fucking song about logs and holes in the bottom of the sea. This is terminal droll, Carly."

At twelve, Mag was a year younger than Billie and Carly, and she always had a smart crack about everything.

Billie shivered inside her E-suit. "Yeah, juice brain, what else was on that old disc about camping? "If you two dweebs will shut up, I'll tell you."

Mag slapped herself over the heart. "Oh, killer clever," Mag said. "Got me."

"They used to tell stories," Carly said, pretending to ignore her. "Like ghosts and monsters and shit."

"Fine," Mag said. "So, tell us one."

Carly went off on a ramble about vampires and ghosts and Billie knew she'd pulled it from an old entcom file. Even so, it was one thing to see the vid in your cube, all warm and well lit, another thing to hear the story out here a klick away from the Main Building in the dark and cold and all. Spooky.

Windblown hail spattered briefly, like a handful of gravel tossed at them, but stopped just as Carly hit the climax of her story.

"—and every year, one of the survivors of that horrible night goes crazy—and now it's *my* turn!"

Mag and Billie both jumped as Carly lunged at them.

Then all three began to giggle.

"Okay, Mag, you're up."

"Yeah, okay. There was this old witch, see...?"

Halfway through Mag's tale some ice pellets fell and bounced around. One must have gotten into the heater's circuits. The unit flashed brightly, blew its fuse, and died. As the glow faded, the only light they had left was from the stars and the crawler's LEDs. The night moved in on them, and the cold and the dark both thickened. All of a sudden, the Main Building seemed a lot farther than a klick away. More hail showered on them. Billie shivered, and it wasn't just from the cold.

"Aw, shit. Look at that. My dad is gonna be pissed we shorted out the aux heater. I'm getting into the crawler," Mag said.

"Come on, finish your story."

“Forget it. My ears are about to freeze off.”

“Well, we have to at least let Billie tell one.”

Carly nodded at Billie. “Your turn.”

“I think Mag is right, let’s get in the crawler.”

“Come on, Billie, don’t do a guppy-up on us.”

Billie took a deep breath and blew out a cloud of cold fog. She remembered her dreams. The wanted something scary? Fine. “Okay. I got one for you.

“There are these things. Nobody knows what planet they come from, but they showed up one day on Rim. They’re the color of black glass, they’re three meters long and have fangs as big as your fingers. They have acid for blood—you cut one and if it bleeds on you, it burns right through to the bone. On you can’t really cut them, ’cause they have skin as hard as a deep spacer’s hull. All they do is eat and reproduce, they’re like giant bugs, and they can bite through tool alloy, their teeth are diamond-hard...”

“Oh, wow,” Carly said.

“If they catch you, you’re *lucky* if they kill you,” Billie continued. “Because if they *don’t* kill you right off, it’s worse than death. They put a baby monster inside of you, they ram it down your throat and it grows in your body, grows until its teeth get sharp enough, and then it chews its way out through meat and bone, it digs a hole in your guts—”

“Creesto, yuk!” Carly said.

Mag slapped herself over the chest.

Billie paused, waiting for the wisecrack.

But Mag said, “I—I don’t... feel too good...”

“Come on, Mag,” Carly said. “This is moronville—”

“N-n-no, I—my stomach—ow!”

Billie swallowed, her throat dry. “Mag?”

“Ahh, it hurts!”

Mag slapped at her chest, as if she were trying to smash a rock beetle with her hand.

Suddenly the E-suit bulged over Mag’s solar plexus, like a fist trying to punch through a sheet of rubber. The suit stretched impossibly.

“Aaahhh!” Mag’s scream washed over Billie.

“Mag! No!” Billie stood, backed away.

Carly reached for Mag. “What is it?”

Mag’s suit stretched again. Tore open. Blood fountained outward, bits of flesh sprayed, and a snakelike thing the size of Billie’s arm flashed needle-pointed teeth in the dim starlight as it emerged from the dying girl.

Carly yelled, her voice breaking. She tried to back away, but the monster shot from Mag to Carly like a rocket. It fastened those terrible fangs on to her throat. It bit. Her blood looked black under the starlight as it spewed into the night. Her scream turned into a gurgle.

“No!” Billie screamed. “No! It was a dream! It wasn’t real! It *wasn’t*! No—!”

* * *

Billie struggled up from sleep screaming.

The medic leaned over her. She was on a pressor bed, and the fields held her firmly to the cushion like a giant hand. She struggled, but the harder she tried, the stronger the field became.

“No!”

“Easy, Billie, easy! It’s only a dream! You’re fine, everything is okay!”

Billie’s breath came in gasps. Her heart pounded, she could feel her pulse in her temples as she stared up at Dr. Jerrin. The indirect light gleamed on the sterile white walls and ceiling of the medical center room. Only a dream. Just like the others.

“I’ll get you a soporific patch,” Jerrin began.

She shook her head, the pressor field would allow that much. “No. No, I’m okay now.”

“You sure?”

He had a kindly face; he was old enough to be Billie’s grandfather. He had treated her for years ever since she’d come to Earth. For the dreams. They weren’t all the same, usually she dreamed about Rim, the world on which she’d been born. It had been thirteen years since the nuclear accident that had destroyed the colony on Rim, almost a decade since she left Ferro. And still the nightmares came carrying her on wild and uncontrollable gallops through her nights. The drugs didn’t help. Counseling, hypnosis, biofeedback, brainwave synthesization, nothing helped.

Nothing could stop the dreams.

He let her up and she moved to the sink to wash her face. The mirror frowned back at her. Her reflection was medium height, slim and tight from all the compulsive time she spent in the exercise chair. Her hair, usually cut short, had grown almost to her shoulders, the pale brown of it straight and nearly ash-colored. Pale blue eyes over a straight nose, a mouth just a hair too big. Not an ugly face but nothing to cross the room to get a better look at. Not ugly, but cursed, sure enough. Some god somewhere must have her in his sights. Billie wished she knew why.

* * *

“Buddha, they’re all around us!” Quinn yelled.

Wilks felt the sweat rolling down his spine under the spidersilk armor. The light was too dim, the helmet lamp didn’t do shit, it was hard to see what was happening around them. The infrared wasn’t working worth a crap, either. “Shut the fuck up, Quinn! Maintain your field of fire, we’re gonna be fine!”

“Oh, fuck, Corp, they got the sarge!” That from Jasper, one of the other remaining marines. There had been twelve of them in the squad. Now there were four. “What are we gonna do?”

Wilks had the little girl in one arm, his carbine in the other hand. The little girl was crying. “Easy, honey,” he said. “We’re gonna be fine. We’re going back to the ship, everything is gonna be okay.”

Ellis, bringing up the rear, swore in Swahili. “Oh, man, oh, man, what the hell *are* these things?” He said.

It was a rhetorical question. Nobody fucking knew.

The heat pounded at Wilks, the air was cloying, it smelled like something dead left too long in the sunshine. Where the things had gotten to the walls of the place the flat everlasting plastic had been overlaid with a thick and convoluted blackish-gray substance. It looked like some mad sculptor had covered the walls with loops of intestine. The twisted coils were as hard as plastcrete, but they put out warmth, some kind of organic decay, maybe. It was like an oven in here, but wetter.

Behind him, Quinn’s caseless carbine came alive again, the sound of the shots battering Wilks’s ears with muted echoes.

“Quinn!”

“There’s a shitload of ’em behind us, Corp!”

“Shoot for targets,” Wilks ordered. “Triplets only! We don’t have enough ammo to waste on full auto suppressive fire!”

Ahead the corridor branched, but the pressure doors had come down and sealed both exits. Flashing light and Klaxon blinked and hooted, and a computer-chip voice kept repeating a warning that the reactor was approaching meltdown.

They were going to have to cut their way out, fast, or get slaughtered by those things. Or else fried into radioactive ash. Great fucking choice.

“Jasper, hold the kid.”

“No!” the little girl yelled.

“I gotta open the door,” Wilks said. “Jasper will take care of you.”

The black marine moved in, grabbed the girl. She clutched at him like a baby monkey does in its mother.

Wilks turned to the door. Pulled his plasma cutter from his belt, triggered it. The white-hot jet of plasma flashed out in a line as long as his forearm. He shoved the cutter against the fail-safe lock, waved it back and forth. The lock was made of tripolystacked carbon, but it wasn’t designed to withstand the heat of a star. The carbon annealed, bubbled, and ran like water under the plasma jet.

The door slid up.

One of the monsters stood there. It lunged at Wilks, a long, toothed rod shooting from its open mouth like a spear at his face. Saliva dripped from its jaws in jellylike strings.

“Fuck!” Wilks dodged to his right and swung the plasma cutter up reflexively. The line caught the thing’s neck, a neck that looked much too thin to support the impossibly large head. How could something like this even stand up? It didn’t make any sense—

The alien creatures were tough, but the plasma was hot enough to melt industrial diamond. The head fell off, bounced on the floor. It kept on trying to bite Wilks, jaws oozing slime as it snapped at him. Didn’t even know it was dead.

“Move it, people! And watch it, the damned thing is still dangerous!”

Jasper screamed.

“Jasper!”

One of the things had him, and it crunched his head like a cat biting a mouse. The little girl—!

“Wilks! Help! Help!”

Another one of the monsters had the girl, it was moving away with her. Wilks twisted, pointed his weapon at it. Realized that if he shot it, the blood would be an acid shower that would kill the child. He’d seen that blood eat through armor that would stop a 10mm caseless round. He dropped his aim lower, pointed the carbine at its legs. It couldn’t run if it didn’t have any feet—

The corridor was full of the things, Quinn opened up, his carbine on full auto, blasting. Armor-piercing and explosive rounds tore through the monsters, spanged from the walls, the stink of propellant filled the air—

Ellis opened up with his flamer, and a stream of fire painted the corridor, splashing from the alien and running in molten gobs down the intestined wall—

“Help!” the little girl cried. “Oh, please, help!”

Oh, God!

* * *

“No!”

Wilks came awake, sweat drenching his hair and face, running into his eyes. His issue coverall was wet. Oh, man.

He sat up. He was still in the cell, on the thin bunk, the dark plastic walls securely in place.

The door slid open. A guard robot was there, two and a half meters tall on its tractor tread gleaming under the jail corridor's lights. The robot's electronic voice said, "Corporal Wilks! Forward and center!"

Wilks rubbed at his eyes. Even a military brig with all its security couldn't keep the dreams out. Nothing could stop the dreams.

"Wilks!"

"Yeah, what?"

"You are to report to MILCOM HQ, OTD."

"Fuck you, tinhead. I got two more days to serve on the S&D."

"You wish, pal," the bot said. "Your high-rank friends say otherwise. Up-levels wants you, OTD."

"What high-rank friends?" Wilks asked.

One of the other prisoners in the multi-unit cell, a fat man from Benares, said, "What friends, period?"

Wilks stared at the line bot. Now, why would the glitter want to see him on the double? Anytime rank started rumbling, it usually meant trouble for the grunts. He felt his gut churn, and it wasn't just the dregs of the chem-binge he'd gone on, either. Whatever this was, it wasn't good.

"Let's go, marine," the bot said. "I am to escort you to MILCOM HQ soonest."

"Lemme shower and clean up first."

"Negative, mister. They said, 'Soonest.'"

The burn scar that mostly covered the left half of his face began to itch suddenly. Oh, shit. Not just bad, but *real* bad.

Now what did they think he'd done?

There was a lot of trash orbiting Earth.

In the hundred years since the first satellites had lifted, careless astronauts or construction crews had lost bolts, tools, and other chunks of hardware. The small stuff, some of it whipping around at fifteen klicks a second relative, could punch a nasty hole in anything less dense than full-sheaf armor, and that included people inside a ship coming or going. Even a chip of paint could dig a crater when it hit. While this was a danger to ships, most of the little stuff burned up on reentry; what didn't was collected by special robot rigs everybody called dust mops.

For a time there was a real risk that the big stuff would get to the ground—part of a construction ship flamed down and killed a hundred thousand people on the Big Island once, and also made Kona coffee exceedingly rare. Because of that and similar incidents, somebody finally realized there was a problem with all the orbiting junk. Laws were passed, and now anything bigger than a man got tagged and swept. And rather than create a new agency, the work was passed on to an organization that already existed.

This was why the Coast Guard cutter *Dutton* hung in high orbit over North Africa, starlight glistening on its armored boron-carbon hull, its crew of two yawning as they moved in to tag a derelict ship. Garbage Control's flight computer said this heap was about to start its fall, and before that happened, the thing had to be probed, checked for anybody who might be camping on it, then blasted into pieces small enough for the dust mops to collect. SOP.

"Probe ready to launch," Ensign Lyle said.

Next to him, the cutter's captain, Commander Barton, nodded. "Stand by and... launch probe."

Lyle touched the control. "Probe away. Telemetry is green. Visuals on, sensors on, one-second burn."

The tiny robot ship rocketed toward the battered freight hauler, feeding electronic information to the cutter behind it.

"Maybe this one is full of platinum ingots," Lyle said.

"Yeah, right. And maybe it's raining on the moon."

"What's the matter, Bar? You don't want to be rich?"

"Sure. And I want to spend ten years in the CG pen fighting off the yard monsters, too. Unless you figured out a way to shut down the blue box?"

Lyle laughed. The blue box recorded everything that went on in the cutter, plus all the probe inputs. Even if the ship was full of platinum, there was no way to hide it from Command. And military officers didn't get salvage rights. "Well, not exactly," Lyle said. "But if we had a few million credits we could *hire* somebody who might."

"Yeah, your mother," Barton said.

Lyle glanced at the computer flat screen. It was cheap hardware; the Navy had full holographies but the Guard still had to make do with the bottom-of-the-line Sumatran Guild electronics. The probe retros flamed as it reached the hulk. "Here we are. Is that good flying, or what?"

Barton grunted. "Look at the hatch. It's bulged outward."

"Explosion, you think?" Lyle said.

"Dunno. Let's open this can up."

Lyle tapped at his keyboard. The probe extruded a universal hatch key and inserted it into the lock.

“No luck. Lock’s shot,” Lyle said.

“I’m not blind, I can see that. Pop it.”

“Hope the inner hatch is closed.”

“Come on, this piece of crap has been up here for at least sixty years. Anybody on it would be dead of old age. There ain’t no air in there and if by some miracle somebody is home, they’re in suspension tank. And aside from *that*, this thing has about thirty minutes before it hits enough atmosphere to boil lead. Pop it.”

Lyle shrugged. Touched controls.

The probe attached a small charge to the hatch and retroed back a hundred meters. The charge flared silently in the vacuum and the hatch shattered.

“Knock, knock. Anybody home?”

“Go see. And try not to bang the probe up too bad this time.”

“That wasn’t my fault,” Lyle said. “One of the retros was plugged.”

“So you say.”

The tiny robot ship moved in through the opening in the derelict ship.

“Inner hatch is open.”

“Good. Saves time. Move it in.”

The probe’s halogens lit as it moved into the ship.

The radiation alarm chimed on the computer’s screen. “Kinda hot in there,” Lyle said.

“Yep, hope you like your soypro well done.”

“Mmm. I guess anybody in this baby would be toast by now. We’ll have to give the probe a bath when it gets back.”

“Chreesto, look at that!” Barton said.

What had been a man floated just ahead of the probe. The hard radiation had killed the bacteria that would have rotted him, and the cold had preserved what the vacuum hadn’t sucked out of him. He looked like a leather prune. He was naked.

“Lordy, lordy,” Lyle said. “Hey, check the wall behind him.” He touched a control and the visual enhanced and enlarged. Something was written on the bulkhead in smeary brown letters: KILL US ALL, it said.

“Damn, is that written in blood? Looks like blood to me.”

“You want an analysis?”

“Never mind. We got us a flip ship.”

Lyle nodded. They’d heard about them, though he himself had never opened one. Somebody went nuts and wasted everybody else. Opened a port and let the air out, or maybe flooded the ship with radiation, like this one. A quick death or a slow one, but death, sure enough. Lyle shivered.

“Find a terminal and see if you can download the ship’s memory. The meter is running here.”

“If the batteries are still good. Oops. Got motion on the detector.”

“I see it. I don’t believe it, but I see it. Nobody can possibly be alive, even somebody in a full radiation suit would cook in this tub—”

“There it is. It’s just a cargo carrier.”

A short, squat robot crawled along a line of Velcro against the ceiling.

“We must have jolted it awake when we blew the hatch.”

“Yeah, right. Get the memory.”

The probe floated toward a control panel.

“Damn, look at those holes in the deck. Looks like something dissolved the plastic. Radiation

wouldn't do that, would it?"

"Who knows? Who cares? Just dump the memory and pull the probe so we can blow this sucker. I have a date tonight and I don't want any overtime."

"You're the commander."

The probe connected to the control board. The ship's power was almost gone, but sufficient to download the memory.

"Coming in," Lyle said. "Here's the ID scan, onscreen."

"No surprises here," Barton said. "Type five nuke drive, lotta deep-space time, bad shields, dead core. No wonder they junked this bucket. That's it. Shove it sunward, set the 10-CA and let's get home."

Lyle touched more controls. The probe placed the small clean atomic against a wall where it adhered. "Okay, three minutes to—aw, shit!"

The screen went blank.

"What did you do?"

"I didn't do *anything*! The camera's gone out."

"Switch to memory drive. We lose another probe and the Old Man'll chew our asses to pulp."

Lyle touched a button. The computer took over the probe. Since it had memorized every centimeter of the flight in, it could retrace the flight and bring the probe back.

"It's clear," Lyle said a moment later. "Burning more fuel than it should, though."

"Maybe it snagged on something coming out. Doesn't matter."

"Probe docking. Outer hatch open. Let me see if I can get an eye on the sucker and see why it's wallowing so bad." Lyle ran his practiced hands over the controls.

"Holy fuck!" Barton said.

Lyle just stared. What the hell was that? Some kind of *thing* sat on the probe as it approached the ship. It looked like a reptile, no, a giant bug. Wait, it had to be some kind of suit, no way it could live in vac without a suit—

"Close the hatch!" Barton yelled.

"Too late! It's inside."

"Flood the bay with antirad! Pump the air out! Blow it back through the fucking door!"

A clang vibrated through the ship. Like a hammer smashing metal.

"It's trying to open the inner hatch!"

Frantically Lyle tapped controls. "Antirad spray on full! Evacuation pumps on!"

The banging continued.

"Okay, okay, don't worry, it can't get in. The hatch is locked. Nobody can break through a sealed boron-carbon hatch with his bare hands!"

Something crashed, ringing loudly. Then came the sound spacers fear more than anything: air rushing out.

"Close the outer hatch, goddammit!"

But the dropping air pressure tugged at Lyle. The cabin was filled with loose items being sucked toward the rear of the cutter. Light pens, coffee cups, a hard-copy magazine fluttering madly. He lunged at the controls, missed the emergency button, lunged again.

Barton, also half out of his chair, stabbed at the red button, but hit the computer override instead. The ship went to manual drive.

The cabin pressure raced toward zero. A hatch-sized hole blew air into space real damned fast. Lyle's eyes bulged, began to bleed. One eardrum popped. He screamed, but found the control for the

external hatch.

“I got it! I got it!”

The outer hatch cycled shut. Emergency air tanks kicked on. The faux gravity pulled the two men back toward their seats. “Goddammit! Goddammit!” Barton said.

“It’s okay, it’s okay, it’s closed!”

“Coast Guard Control, this is the cutter *Dutton!*” Barton began. “We have a situation here!”

“Oh, *man!*” Lyle said.

Barton twisted.

The thing stood right fucking there!

It had *teeth!* It came toward them. It looked hungry.

Barton tried to get up, fell, and hit the drive control. The ship was still on manual. The drive kicked on. The acceleration threw the monster backward, drove Lyle and Barton into their seats. Even though they couldn’t move, the thing somehow managed to drag itself onward.

It was a nightmare. It couldn’t be real.

The thing ripped chunks out of Lyle’s seat as it pulled him from the chair. Blood sprayed as its clawed hands punctured his shoulders. It opened its mouth and a rod shot out, so fast Barton could hardly see it. The rod buried itself in Lyle’s head like his skull was putty. Blood and brain tissue splashed. Lyle screamed in total terror.

The cutter, still under acceleration, headed directly toward the radioactive hulk in front of it.

The monster jerked that hellish thing from Lyle’s skull. It made a sucking sound, like a foot pulled out of mud. The creature turned toward Barton. Barton drew breath to scream, but the sound never came out—

At that instant the cutter smashed into the scuttled freighter—

—and the bomb the probe had set went off.

Both ships were destroyed in the explosion. Virtually everything was shattered into tiny bits that spiraled in a long loop toward Sol.

Everything except the blue box.

* * *

Wilks stared at the screen as it washed white.

Amazing how well the blue boxes were armored, to survive even a close atomic blast like that.

He looked at the guard bot. “Okay, I’ve seen it.”

“Let’s go,” the bot said.

They were alone in a conference room in MIL-COM HQ. Wilks stood, and the bot led the way. If he’d had a gun, he would have shot the bot and tried to run. Yeah. Right.

As they walked along the corridor, Wilks put it together. So this was why they’d never kicked him out of the Corps. It was only a matter of time before humans stumbled across the aliens again. They hadn’t wanted to believe him about what had happened on Rim, but the truth machines wouldn’t let them off the hook that easy. The brain strainers had pulled it out of him, and the Corps never threw anything away that might be useful someday.

His belly clenched around a cold knot, like somebody had jammed a blade of liquid nitrogen in his guts. The bomb on Rim hadn’t gotten them all. The military found itself in need of an expert on these things and Corporal Wilks was what it had. Probably didn’t make them very happy, but they would make do.

He wasn't looking forward to this meeting. It certainly wasn't going to do him any good. Not at all.

Salvaje's place was almost directly under the huge reactor shield for the Southern Hemisphere Power Grid Switching Station. The PGSS field was big enough so it sometimes created its own weather. Mostly that was rain. Day and night, steady, unrelieved, dreary-as-shit rain. The building was eon-planned, prefab, proof against the more or less constant downpour, a dull gray material that blended in against the sky the color of melted lead. It was a good place to hide. Nobody came here unless they had a reason, even the ground police avoided the rain when they could.

Pindar the holotech splashed through puddles, ankle deep despite the drainage pumps' attempts to clear the water. If Salvaje didn't have so much spare money he was willing to part with, Pindar would have avoided this scum hole. The building walls were thick with mold, even the retardant paint couldn't stop it, and there were rumors that you could catch a mutant strain of flu here that would kill you before you could get to a medic—which wouldn't help anyhow because even recombinant antivirals couldn't touch the stuff. Nice.

The door slid open on creaky runners as Pindar walked up the incline to Salvaje's place.

"You're late," came the ghostly voice from within.

Pindar stepped inside, stripped off the osmotic rainfilm that kept him dry, dropped the torn bits of spiderweb-thin plastic onto the floor. "Yeah, well, between my day job and this shit, it's lucky I can find time to sleep."

"I care nothing for your sleep. I pay well."

Pindar looked at Salvaje. He was ordinary enough. Medium height, hair slicked straight back with some kind of electrostatic hold, a little beard and mustache. He could have been thirty or fifty; he had one of those faces that don't seem to age much. He wore a plain black coverall and flexboots. Pindar wasn't sure what a holy man ought to look like, but Salvaje sure wasn't it.

"There," Salvaje said, pointing.

Pindar saw the cam on a table. "Damn, where'd you get that antique? It looks like an old ship's monitor—"

"Where I got it is not important. Can you use it to tie us into the Nets?"

"Señor, I can tie you into the Nets with a toaster and a couple of microwave cooker circuit boards. I am a very good technician."

Salvaje said nothing, only stared at Pindar with those cold gray eyes of his. Pindar repressed a shudder. Gave him the crawlies when he did that. "Sí, I can put you on the air. But visual and auditory only. No sublims, no subsonics, no olfactories. Be pretty tame compared to what your competition is throwing at the GU."

"The Great Unwashed will hear the truth of my message without trickery. And they will see the image of the True Messiah. Such things will be enough. Behold!"

Salvaje touched a control on an old projector on the table next to him and a hologram shimmered to life behind him.

"*Madre de Dios!*" Pindar said softly.

The image was perhaps three meters from the tip of its pointed, spiky tail to the top of its banana-shaped and grotesque head. If it had eyes, they seemed recessed just behind twin rows of needle-tipped teeth. Pindar stepped to one side and saw what appeared to be thick external ribs jutting from the thing's back, and overall, it looked as if some god playing a joke had created a manlike thing born of

giant insects. The monster was a dull black or dark gray, and Pindar would not wish to meet such a thing under any circumstances. He didn't know what the Messiah was supposed to look like, either, but he would bet all the iron in the Asteroid Belt that this wasn't it.

"I can put you on the air in five minutes," Pindar said, bending to pick up the antique camera. "Along with your...messiah. It is your money. But I wonder that anyone will look upon this thing and think it might deliver them, señor. I myself would expect to see it in Hades."

"Do not blaspheme about that which you do not understand, technician."

Pindar shrugged. He accessed the camera's computer, tied it into a shunt, and rigged a relay transmitter. He moved quickly to the power unit and control console, tapping stolen codes into an orbiting broadcast satellite. He held off on the last digit, then turned to Salvaje. "When I input the final number, you will have three minutes before the WCC locks its trace of our signal. Two more minutes and they will find the dish I hid in Madras, and two minutes after that they will find the place. Best you hold your transmission to five minutes. I have an automatic cut off thirty seconds after that. I will have to find another bounce dish if you wish to broadcast again."

"*Esta no importa*," Salvaje said.

Pindar shrugged. "Your money."

Salvaje reached up, as if to stroke the dreadful image of the hologram floating in the air behind him. His fingers passed through the image. "Others will have heard the call. I must speak to them."

Crazy as a shithouse rat, Pindar thought. But of this he did not speak aloud. "All right. In five seconds. Three. Two. One." He input the final number.

Salvaje smiled into the camera's lens. "Good day, fellow seekers. I have come to you with the Great Truth. The coming of the True Messiah..."

Pindar shook his head. He would sooner worship his dog than this hideous image, which had to be a computer simulation. Nothing could really look like that.

* * *

The patient cafeteria was nearly empty, a dozen or so of the inmates shuffling their drug-calmed way through the line with soft plastic trays. Billie moved in her own chemical fog, feeling tired, but unable to rest.

Sasha sat at a table next to the holoprojection chair, using a fork made of linear plastic to stir some ugly noodles around on her plate. The tableware was strong enough to lift the food but would curl up like cardboard if you tried to stick somebody with it. Somebody like yourself.

"Hey, Billie," Sasha said. "Check out Deedee, she's switching channels on the 'jector every three seconds. Why, I think that girl is mentally disturbed!"

Sasha laughed. Billie knew Sasha's history. She had pushed her father into a vat of jewelry cleaning acid when she was nine. She'd been here for eleven years because every time they asked her whether she'd do it again if she had the chance, she grinned and told them sure. Every day of the week and twice on Sunday.

Billie glanced at Deedee. The girl was gazing at the 'jector as if hypnotized. The tiny hologram blinked as she changed the channels. With four or five hundred choices, it would take even Deedee a while to see them all.

"C'mon, have a seat. Try some of this worm puke, it's real good."

Billie sat, almost collapsing.

"You on blues again?"

Billie sighed. “Greens.”

“Crap, what’d you do, strangle a nurse?”

“The dreams.”

Billie glanced at the tiny viewer in front of Deedee. A deep-space ship flew across the void. Blink. A car chase on a multilane surface road. Blink. A documentary on feral elves. Blink.

“C’mon, Billie,” Sasha said, “you only have what, a month left until your hearing?”

“I won’t skate this time either, Sash. They can’t figure it out. They say my folks died in an explosion. I know better. I was *there!*”

“Ease up, kid. The monitors—”

“Hey, *fuck* the monitors!” Billie shoved her plate across the table, scattering the safety tableware and the noodles. The rubbery plate fell to the cushioned floor, bounced, but made hardly any sound. “They can send a ship a hundred light-years away to another system, they can make an android from amino soup and plastic, but they can’t cure me of nightmares!”

Attendants appeared as if by magic, but Billie’s rage couldn’t stand any longer against the sedatives in her system. She slumped.

Behind her, Deedee said quietly, “Hold channel.”

The image of a man with slicked-back hair and a smallish beard shined in the air before her. An image behind him, behind him was—was—

“—join us, my friends,” the man’s voice spoke into the speaker implanted behind Deedee’s mastoid bone. “Join the Church of Immaculate Incubation. Receive the ultimate communion. Become one with the True Messiah...”

Deedee smiled as the attendants came and helped Billie to her feet. Billie didn’t see the True Messiah as she left.

“Dammit, let go!”

Then somebody pressed a green patch to her carotid and Billie stopped even that much of struggle.

* * *

Wilks and the robot reached the security door leading into MILCOM HQ Intel One. A scanning laser tapped a red dot against his eye and by the time he had finished blinking, the door’s comp had ID’d him and begun to roll open. The bot said, “Go on in. I’ll wait here.”

Wilks did as he was told. He felt the pressure of stares against him, knowing he was being watched by computers and probably live guards, that his every move was recorded. Fuck it.

There was only one other door in the corridor, so he couldn’t miss it. It opened as he approached. He stepped into the office. Nothing but an oval table, big enough to seat a dozen people, three chairs. Two of the chairs were occupied. In one was a full bird colonel, wearing interior regulations. No combat medals, a desk pilot. He’d be the MI officer in charge. There was an oxymoron, “military intelligence.”

The other man was in civilian garb, and he had the look. Wilks would bet a month’s pay this guy was a t-bag—Terran Intelligency Agency. Any odds anybody wanted.

“At ease, marine,” the colonel said. Wilks wasn’t aware that he’d been at attention. Old habits die hard.

Wilks noticed that the colonel, his name tag said “Stephens,” kept his hands behind his back. Like maybe he was afraid to touch him.

Not so the civilian. He extended one hand. “Corporal Wilks.”

sample content of The Complete Aliens Omnibus, Volume 1: (Earth Hive, Nightmare Asylum, The Female War)

- [read La Casa Verde pdf, azw \(kindle\)](#)
- [Typhoon pdf, azw \(kindle\)](#)
- [download online The Waning of the Middle Ages](#)
- [No Mud, No Lotus: The Art of Transforming Suffering pdf, azw \(kindle\)](#)
- **[read online Daisy Miller for free](#)**
- [download Against a Crimson Sky \(2nd Edition\) \(Poland Trilogy, Book 2\) pdf](#)

- <http://www.1973vision.com/?library/Dreaming-the-Myth-Onwards--New-Directions-in-Jungian-Therapy-and-Thought.pdf>
- <http://conexdx.com/library/Phoenix-Island.pdf>
- <http://jaythebody.com/freebooks/The-Waning-of-the-Middle-Ages.pdf>
- <http://fortune-touko.com/library/Twilight--The-Mediator--Book-6-.pdf>
- <http://paulczajak.com/?library/Daisy-Miller.pdf>
- <http://musor.ruspb.info/?library/Against-a-Crimson-Sky--2nd-Edition---Poland-Trilogy--Book-2-.pdf>