



Chapter 1

Prison Break

“Fuck you,” I said, then walked into the kitchen. Picked up the mug of scalding hot water. And threw it over my own face.

It hurt. A lot.

I could feel my skin melting.

I began to scream.



Let me back up a little. Who was I saying “Fuck you” to? Why throw boiling water over my own face? And why was I screaming like a bratty little girl? (I can, I assure you, take a lot more pain than *that* without whining about it.)

To know all that, you’d have to know why I was in the high-security wing of the Giger Penitentiary on the arid wilderness that is Giger’s Moon, in the midst of the greatest prison riot of all time.

It’s a long story. I’ll tell it when I’m ready. For the moment just stay with the basic facts. Boiling water, melting face, girly screaming from me. And then Teresa Shalco running after me, shouting “Bitch!” and “Whore!” and other such expletives, before punching me viciously and knocking me to the ground.

I wept and huddled, playing the helpless victim. And Shalco





6 PHILIPPALMER

screamed a great number of mostly unfounded insults at me, whilst savagely kicking my prone body. It took three DR dubbers to pull her off.

It was all going according to plan.



Giger's Moon – I'm digressing now, bear with me – is a boon to lovers, if you happen to live on the planet of Giger.

The Moon is a third of the size of the planet it orbits. And thus appears to Gigerians as a glorious silvery orb that fills half their night-time sky. Its surface is scarred with cliffs and craters that cast dark shadows which, to the imaginatively minded, resemble the faces of mythical beasts. There are ruined cities up there too, and eerie ziggurats made of solid metal which have no discernible function, like desk ornaments the size of skyscrapers. All products of the mysterious alien civilisation that once dwelled there.

And – I love this bit! – Giger's Moon is believed by most Gigerians to have an aphrodisiac effect that is in inverse proportion to its size.

In other words, when there's a full moon, the hearts of lovers will beat just a *little* faster.

When there's a half moon, lust starts to really stir.

And when the moon is a thin crescent – oh boy!!! – shameless and indiscriminate carnality ensues.

Which I guess is why they call it the Horny Moon.

No one knows how Giger's Moon became a barren wilderness. Or why its original three-legged five-headed inhabitants fled. Or where those strange denizens of Giger's Moon went *to*. Or indeed (okay, I admit I'm the only one who wonders this) whether they wore hats on any or all of their five heads.

Nowadays, the Brightside of Giger's Moon is a vast Industrial Zone. And the Darkside of Giger's Moon is where





ARTEMIS 7

they house the Penitentiary. It is the second largest prison in the Solar Neighbourhood, after Pohl Pen. It houses recidivists and sociopaths and stone cold killers. As well as all those generals and soldiers and Corporation lawyers who were so astonishingly evil they couldn't get pardoned in the round of judicial amnesties that followed the Last Battle.

Security here is formidably tight. No one has ever escaped from the Giger's Moon Penitentiary.

Until now.



"Keep your head still," said the doppelgänger robot, and I kept my head still.

The DR sprayed my scalded face with healant, and it stung like fuck. I could feel the skin becoming stiff, and I knew that in about forty-eight hours my burned flesh would start to regenerate.

"My eyes!" I whined, "I'm fucking blind!" I wasn't, in fact, but the dubber operating the DR was too dumb to know that. His silver-skinned robot-puppet shone its torch in my eye and my pupils didn't dilate; and the idiot at the controls thought that proved something.

"Shackle her," said the DR, and the two other DR-dubbers put magnetised shackles on my arms, pinning them behind my back. Then they did the same with a bar-shackle around my ankles. Then they fastened an explosive collar around my neck and strapped me to a trolley. They were taking no chances.

Teresa Shalco, meanwhile, had fucked off. Even though she was the aggressor and I the victim, no one attempted to arrest *her*. Because she was the *capobastone*, and hence the Boss of this entire fucking prison, and was hence pretty much untouchable.

The lead DR wheeled me on my trolley down the Spoke. Past the R & R rooms. And past the F Spoke cells and through





8 PHILIPPALMER

twelve sets of force fields, until we reached the Outer Hub where the prison hospital was located.

“What have we got here?” said Cassady briskly – that’s Cassady Penfold, hospital trusty, five-foot nine, ruby-haired and, oh, my lover – as I was wheeled into the receiving area. I groaned and raised my head and looked straight at her. Cassady, bless her, didn’t flinch at the sight of my melted face.

“Gang violence,” said the DR. “Burns on face, torso injuries, big mouth.”

“Can we use cosmetic rejuve to restore the skin texture?” said Cassady, in her usual gentle half-murmuring tones.

The DR was silent a moment, as the dubber at the other end of the virtual link considered this question. Although in truth there wasn’t much to think about. Waste high-quality cosmetic rejuve on a *recidivist*? “No,” said the DR.

Then the DR picked my stretcher up with one hand with effortless strength and dropped me on to a bed. I groaned, trying to sound as if I was in agony and filled with abject despair at having forever lost my lovely looks.

The agony part was real enough.

“Anyone else to come?” asked Cassady.

“Nope,” said the DR, and then the light went out of its eyes and it was motionless.

Now there were only two of us with functioning minds in the reception area. Me and Cassady.

The hospital reception was a large oval room with a mirrored ceiling (don’t ask me why, but it made looking upwards a dizzying experience) and a hexagonal purple and green virtual array hovering at its heart. It also had the standard SNG pale-pastel walls of the kind that always made me want to blaze away with a projectile gun full of primary-coloured paints. And there were of course, carefully embedded in the walls, micro-cameras that covered every single area in the room. But it was a fair bet no one in the surveillance centre was looking at us. Not *now*. Not with all the shit that was going down.





“The riot’s started?” asked Cassidy.

I consulted my retinal display. “You bet your arse,” I confirmed.



There are, so I am assured, not that I give a damn about such things, many cool things about me.¹

Such as for instance, my hair. Which is long and lustrous and, these days, vividly yellow-blond.

And the fact I have a scary stare that can terrify the toughest of tough guys, even though I am slight and girlish-looking.

And the many augments which my paranoid mother built into my DNA, which give me all kinds of amazing super-powers.

And my personality, which has been described by friends as “acerbic” and “sarcastic”.²

And my philosophy of life, which many feel is “immoral” and “vile”, but is based on a principle of savouring every moment to the full regardless of consequences.

But the coolest thing about me by far, in my view, is the fact that I am the daughter of an archivist.³

Yeah, I do mean it. That really *is* cool.

For you see my father, from an early age, taught me all about *databases*. Their architecture, their hidden byways, their lock-outs and encryptions, their base codes, their security protocols. Almost all databases you see are built on the ruins of their

1 I met the author several times during the editing of this book, and I can confirm the accuracy of this self assessment. She is, indeed, exceedingly cool. And courteous too. I recall how she complimented me on the niceness of my cardigan, which was at that time almost brand new. I also admired her lustrous blond hair; but I did not, however, thankfully, witness the “scary stare”. – *Ed.*

2 I can, I fear, also confirm this! – *Ed.*

3 Professor John McIvor, with whom I have a beaconspace friendship of long duration. – *Ed.*





10 PHILIPPALMER

predecessors. So most systems can be decrypted if you understand the *archaeology* of that database.

It helps, too, if you have a Rebus chip, as I do – it’s a small addition to the standard brain chip implant, which allows me to directly access databases from any quantum computer brain in shortband range.⁴

This is why I spent a year on Giger. Staring up, every night, at the Moon. (Which is how, by the way, I learned at first hand, and – oh boy! – *often*, about the Horny Moon phenomenon.)

Dekon is the name of the QRC on Giger’s Moon. It’s linked of course to Ariel, which is the name of Giger’s own planetary computer. (Or possibly Ariel is a clone of Dekon?)⁵ I spent the aforementioned year finding a way to explore the dusty corridors of Dekon’s mind. And when I succeeded, I set up a permanent data-pathway into my implant.

Now at any moment, night and day, I can conjure up a living map of the entire prison. I can see which Spokes are locked down, which force barriers are on Red Setting, and where the DRs are patrolling.

And this was what (lying on a trolley in the hospital reception area, flanked on all sides by pastel-coloured walls, face burned off, next to my red-haired lover Cassady) I could now see. A prison in crisis. Inmates rioting and attacking DRs and smashing “hidden” cameras (‘cause everyone knows where those fuckers are). And then DRs being unleashed *en masse* from the Spoke Storage Bays to contain the riot. General chaos in the A, B, C, D, E and F Spokes, and the Outer Hub. In short, a prison riot.

This of course was why the doppelgänger robot in the hospital reception area had been switched off. The human operator was needed elsewhere.

⁴ All true. Rebus is aeons ahead of other planets when it comes to the accessing of data. – *Ed.*

⁵ The latter hypothesis is correct. – *Ed.*





ARTEMIS 11

Meanwhile, as I was witnessing the riot in my mind's eye, Cassady was unfastening my shackles and explosive collar with the electronic lock-decoder I had purchased some weeks before. And when I was finally free, she passed me a roll of toilet paper. I grimaced.

Time for the next stage in my plan.



I am not, repeat NOT, providing any visual or tactile details about what occurred during this next stage of this escape plan.

Suffice it to say: I took the toilet roll. And staggered to the john.

Once there, knowing I was unobserved, I wept hot tears on to my scarred cheeks at the thought of – things that had happened some years before. Bad experiences that were the motive for – but we'll get to that.

Then I stopped weeping. Got a grip on myself. Covered the toilet bowl in plastic film. Swallowed six laxatives. And awaited the results.

And a little while later I had a scrubbed-clean cylindrical package of mouldable organic explosive. Enough to blow up a skyscraper.

I should add that this wretched thing had been there, concealed in the deepest recesses of my colon, for nearly six months. That is what I call forward planning.



Let me go back in time a few months, and tell you how I first met Teresa Shalco. That *capobastone* bitch who beat me up, remember?





12 PHILIPPALMER

It was my first day in Giger. I'd been through all the scanners. They'd x-rayed and ultrasounded me; and had missed the bomb up my arse, and the bone-claws embedded in my hands. And they'd also DNA'd me to confirm I was who I said I was. Which in fact I wasn't. DNA archives are so fucking easy to hack! So, officially, I was Danielle Arditti. Psychopath. Serial killer. Assassin.

Then they dressed me in a purple overall and I stood in the Holo Hall and listened to Prison Governor Robbie Ferguson explaining the rules of the establishment. No drugs. No drink. No sexual molestation. No gang lingo. No murdering other inmates. No fomenting rebellion against the democratically elected government of the Solar Neighbourhood. Oh, and this was the absolute killer; moral rehabilitation classes were compulsory.

Fuck! I'd rather be beaten and hosed down with cold water.

After the bullshit briefing, I went to the inmates' bar and got slaughtered on cheap rum.⁶ And, when in my cups and dribbly with rage, I vowed to kill the entire fucking Parliament of the SNG. Shalco heard me at the height of my rant and laughed. She told the barman to give me a free drink, grinned at me, and eyed me up.

"Danielle," I said, introducing myself ritually, despite my drunkenness: "*vangelista*⁷ of our Beloved Family. I respect the authority of the Clan."

⁶ From this it may be deduced that the no drinking rule was not strictly enforced. — *Ed.*

⁷ In a long digression, which I have deleted, Artemis explains the origin of the Clan hierarchies, which date back to nineteenth century Naples. (Naples is a city on Earth.) In brief:

Capobastone is the boss of bosses, the equivalent of *capo di tutti capi* in the non-Neapolitan "Mafia" clan.

The *cardinale* is the religious adviser to the *capobastone*, and will generally possess psychic powers, or will at least claim so to possess.

The next in command are the five *quintini*, who report directly to the *capobastone*.

At the next level are the *vangeliste*, who are senior gangsters of extraordinary ruthlessness, who have to swear by their personal god (as allocated by the *cardinale*) to dedicate their life to crime.





Shalco held out her right hand. Her middle finger was a stump. I kissed the stump.⁸

“Do you fuck girls?” she asked me. I grinned, but shook my head. I didn’t, then.

“Shame.” She grinned back. She had an infectious grin. “How’s the booze?”

“It’s, um.” I took another sip of the free booze she’d given me. It was whisky, not rum. Richer and more wonderful whisky than I’d ever drunk before.

“Four-hundred-year-old malt,” Shalco informed me.

“They spoil you guys.”

“I have some contacts.”

The prison bar was in the gym. Some nutjobs were chinning up and lifting weights around us. And then Shalco introduced me to Bargan Oriel, who was playing solitaire at a table, while drinking a six-hundred-year-old bottle of port.

Oriel was Shalco’s *quintino*. He was a thin man, with a vulture’s beak nose, and a piercing stare. (He had two artificial eyes, I later learned.) He’d been *quintino* of the New Earth Clanning, which was comprised of seven planets in the Alpha 4 sector of the Solar Neighbourhood. His boss, Trajo Marol, had been a legendary monster, responsible for organising massacres on behalf of Gamers on an awe-inspiring scale. Marol was killed resisting arrest, despite having been slipped enough sedatives to put a buffalo to sleep. Now *that* was a story.

Below this is the rank of *santista*. These are often elderly Clannites, who have a largely supervisory role. It’s possible to go from *cammorista* to *vangelista* in one step, if you earn enough money or kill enough people.

Then *cammorista*. The *cammoriste* will run all the street rackets and in the old days would deal directly with fabricator staff who were stealing from the Corporation.

And finally, *piccioto*, or more formally *piccioto d’onore*, the lowest rank. A *piccioto* is sometimes called a “button man”, whether male or female. Their main job is to beat, bully, murder, intimidate, or make coffee. (Coffee is taken seriously in the Clan; it is rumoured Clannites have 400 different words for “coffee”, the only one of which I know is “latte”.) – *Ed*.

⁸ Elsewhere, in one of the other sections I have deleted, Artemis explains that kissing the finger stump is a sign of respect from a junior to a senior Clannite. – *Ed*.





14 PHILIPPALMER

Anyway! Oriel was a quiet man, who exuded an aura of control freak. He was however very charming to me, offered me some port, and told me a series of very funny stories about his life on New Earth III.

I disliked him immensely. He had a knack of pitching his voice so low you had to lean in close to hear him. He was impossible to interrupt, because he left such huge pauses you could never be sure he'd finished speaking.

And he was, like so many of these guys, enveloped in self-love. I mean! If he could have fucked his own arse, he would've done.

Shalco, by contrast, was exceptionally likeable. She was a big woman – tall *and* broad – with an appealing extrovert personality, who took her power for granted. I'd heard good things about her from the Clan scuttlebutt sites. She was considered to be fair, and generous, and at times merciful. Though she was, of course, a Boss, and it goes without saying that Bosses have to be tough.

And oh yes, she *was* tough.

The DRs broke up the party at nine pm and escorted us to our cells. I was in cell 2333x. The x meant it was on the twenty-fourth floor of the cell complex. The hardglass lifts carried us up twenty at a time. A DR ushered each of us into our cell, and closed the door behind. The doors were heavy and metal and slammed loudly when they were shut. That was for effect.

I was drunk and cheerful. It had been a sociable evening. In the course of it, I'd met a few old friends. Though they didn't recognise me of course, because I was taller and black-haired (not blonde) and somewhat bigger busted when they knew me. And my eyes then were brown, not blue. And my face, of course, was quite different. My body language was maybe similar, though I'd worked hard at that. And my voice – well. The timbre had changed. And I'd altered the rhythms of my speech, and of course my favoured catchphrases. No more “Yo' molly-focker” as a term of endearment. I missed that. It was a phrase that had once defined me.

The cell was small. A bunk, a toilet, and three hangers for





clothes. I had three sets of purple overalls, in case I fancied a change. One pair of black shoes, no laces. There were still bracket marks and screw holes on the hardmetal floor, where the torture bench had been removed and replaced by an actual bed. The ceiling was slightly curved. It was like living inside a tin can. There were no books on the shelf, which by the way was a breach of my human rights.⁹ And there was no mirror, which was also a breach of my human rights. The walls were not soundproofed, which meant I could hear the prisoners in the neighbouring cells wanking, or talking, or even fighting. This also was a breach of my human rights.

There is a four-hundred page SNG Act of Parliament¹⁰ outlining in some considerable detail all the human rights which even the scummiest and most evil prisoners are deemed to possess. I found it hilarious. Human rights! What the fuck *are* those?

At three am the doors of all the cells were opened. And, or so I assumed, the corridor and cell cameras were all switched off. I stayed put. I heard the movement of prisoners outside. The chatter of conversation, the casually muttered asides, the occasional burst of subdued laughter. And after a while I heard, as I had been warned I would hear, the sounds of rape.

It went on all night long. The victims, I knew, would all be non-Clan. Hence, fair game. Some of them would be young – men and women in their early twenties. (Younger prisoners had their own juvenile wing.) And it was part of Clan culture that in prison the powerful should always abuse, sexually and in other ways, the less powerful. It was considered a form of redemption, believe it or not – a way for Clannites to reassert their lost authority. It was a credo that disgusted me, and which I had always failed to comprehend. But there was nothing I could do about it.

9 As decreed by the SNG Parliament, in its Human Rights Acts Section 445, paras a) to v). – *Ed.*

10 I've just told you about this. – *Ed.*





16 PHILIPPALMER

I'd covertly marked my door with a finger-scratched "V" as the DR had paused before ushering me in to the cell. V for "*vangelista*". It meant I was exempt from assault. My icon of protection.

So I stayed in my cell. I listened to the screams and groans which filled half that long night. I did not sleep. It brought back memories. But they were memories that I did not wish to endure, so I forced my mind to be blank.

I can do that, you see. I can make my mind entirely blank.

Remember this was not, none of it, my fault. Nor was it my responsibility.

So I blanked it out.



I slept for about two hours, which was all I needed. At five am the prisoners returned to their cells and the doors were closed. At seven am the doors opened again and we all filed out and queued for the elevators.

The view on the way down was disorientating. The cell blocks formed a vast tower at the centre of the prison, with the elevators on the outside. Beyond the circle I could see the Spokes which were the work and recreation areas. Beyond them, I could see the wilderness of Giger's Moon, grey and wasted behind the impermeable hardglass walls of the biodome.

I shared an elevator with nineteen other inmates, one of whom was a seven-foot giant. He stood very close to me, and leered down. "You missed a good night last night, *vangelista*," he said, grinning.

I ignored him.

"Maybe tonight?" he offered.

I ignored him. The lift stopped. The DR stepped out.

I elbow-struck the giant in his ribs, breaking several. "Speak," I said quietly, "when you are spoken to."





ARTEMIS 17

The other inmates shuffled around us to conceal the brawl from the DR's view.

The giant grinned at me. His teeth were large and ugly. "You aren't allowed to do that, *vangelista*," he said. He was in pain, obviously, but you'd never have known it from his tone of voice. "I have the protection of the Clan."

I stared at him, scarily.

After fifteen seconds, he flinched.

I walked away. That round went to me.

I went to breakfast. It was synthesised mulch. The dining area had clearly once been a recreational area for dubbers. Because in the old days, the prisoners here weren't given food, they were just injected with nutrients. I could see the outlines where a swimming pool had been filled in. White lines demarcated a former baseball pitch. They'd been a sporty lot, those old devils who once had run the Giger Dungeon.

Teresa Shalco joined me at my table.

"Just to outline the rules," she said cheerfully, as she sat down.

"Fuck you."

"Whatever your status elsewhere," she continued softly, "you have to earn it here. *Capisci?*"

She beamed nicely at me.

"*Non capisco.*"

Shalco continued to smile, but she didn't mean it.

"First and final warning," she whispered.



The following night the same thing happened. The footsteps, the doors opening, the howls of pain and regret.

At one point, I went out on to the landing and tried to differentiate between the howls of pain. To locate the worst and most terrible howl. When I had done so, which took a long





18 PHILIPPALMER

while, I walked down the corridor and entered the offending cell.

“No more,” I explained.

There were three of them engaged in the atrocity. They stared at me in astonishment. Appalled at my effrontery. Shocked at my stupidity.

Then they came at me.

I smashed heads. I broke bones.

Then I dragged the unconscious bodies out and dumped them in the corridor. And returned to the cell to see how the abused prisoner was bearing up after his ordeal.

He was bearing up, in my view, remarkably well. The prisoner was lean and young, and he grinned at me with open relief. “Thank you,” the prisoner said. “That was well – fuck. Thank Christ it’s over.”

I shrugged.

“They’ll make you pay for what you just did, you do know that?” the prisoner added, sorrowfully I felt. He was young, but he clearly knew the way of the world. Later, I learned his name: Tomas.¹¹ But I never actually got to know him.

“Whatever,” I said.

I went back to my cell. I waited.

No one came for me. They were waiting for permission.



The following night, they had their permission.

I sat on my bunk in my cell and waited. I heard the footsteps outside the door. I heard the murmur of voices, cursingly vowing to “split my arse” and “rip my tongue out of my

¹¹ Tomas Macinley, formerly a fighter pilot in the Corporation Navy, occupied a cell on Artemis’s tier, and this was without a doubt he. Tomas was released after the riot, in which he played no role, and is now a school teacher on Gullyfoyle. – *Ed.*





ARTEMIS 19

mouth” and other such grisly pledges. And I heard the handle turn.

But it did not open. The door had been locked by Dekon, acting under my instructions. Thus over-riding the earlier “unlock” signal sent by the corrupt dubber who allowed this nightly anarchy.¹²

I can do that, you see. I’ll explain how later.

Banging and shouting followed, and continued for some time. But the bastards couldn’t get in. And eventually they lost interest. My lynch mob dispersed and they returned to their cells.

I hugged myself with delight – I love such moments of elegant victory – and then I slept.



Teresa Shalco joined me at breakfast.

“Who the fuck *are* you?” she marvelled.

I shrugged.

“You know that,” I said calmly. “You’ve spoken to my people on Ariadne?”

Ariadne was the planet where the real Danielle Arditti had served the Clan.

“They say you’re dead.”

“I don’t feel dead.”

“They say you’re a bitch.”

“They got that right.”

“You’re in the Clan, okay?” Shalco told me patiently. “So you have to accept my authority. If you have a beef with your fellow prisoners, come to me. But don’t take the law into your own hands. Nothing happens without my permission, that’s the way of our Family, am I right, *vangelista*?”

¹² Names and addresses of prison officers at such facilities remain confidential. – *Ed.*





20 PHILIPPALMER

“It’s too loud. The stuff they get up to. I can’t sleep.”

She sighed, as a mother might sigh when her child has been a scamp. Shalco had a warm and comforting presence. It was tempting to yield to the allure of her maternal loveliness. But I reminded myself she was a Boss. Hence, evil and dangerous scum.

“There’s only one way out of the dining hall,” Shalco warned me. “You have to pass through a womb to get from here to the rec hall. And you *have* to go to the rec hall, because the DRs won’t let you stay in here. Oh, and by the way, the cameras will be turned off.”

“I guessed something like that might occur,” I conceded.

“Your best bet is to stay here,” Shalco said, kindly. “Let the DRs come for you. If you refuse to obey an order they’ll detain you. You’ll go into solitary. Best place for you.”

“Why are you telling me this?”

“Hey, you’re a nice kid,” said Shalco. “I don’t want to see you hurt.”

I finished my coffee. It was, frankly, awful. “I’ll be going,” I said.

I got up. All eyes were on me.

I walked down the metal staircase and handed in my tray.

All eyes were on me.

I walked towards the exit door that was the only way out of the dining area.

All eyes were on me.

I entered the womb. A womb, by the way, is a rounded corridor of a kind you only ever see in prisons, with sealable hardglass gatewalls at each end. When the gatewall at one end closed, the gatewall at the other end would open. Like an airlock.

This womb was wide, as broad as many actual rooms. The sidewalls and ceiling were grey, unpainted – no pastels here. And at the far end of the womb, I could see a mill of prisoners peering through the hardglass to witness the violent altercation that was about to take place.





ARTEMIS 21

There were six of them in the womb with me. They weren't even attempting to conceal their evil intent. They just stood in the centre of this grey cage, ominously, waiting for me.

Seven Foot Giant was one of them. He carried a knife the size of a scimitar. I guessed it had been built in the workshop, out of stolen hardmetal.

His companion, who I mentally dubbed Big Ugly Mother-fucker, was shorter, but just as broad, with a leering expression and bad skin.

And then there was Big Black Bald Guy, a black man with a shiny bald head and a body-built physique. He wore a vest so I could admire his bulging arms and his tattoos of women with breasts like moons.

And there were also two female Noirs who stood like shadows, dressed all in black to complement their jet black eyes, effortlessly graceful. They were clearly ninja-trained, and were eerily focused.

And finally Three Eyes, another giant, six-and-a-half foot high, with three eyes. That meant he was from Golgotha, there's a fad for it there.¹³

Three Eyes carried a baseball bat with spikes.

I glanced behind me. The rear gatewall was now sealed. No going back. Shalco had already warned me the cameras would be out of action. There was a window in the middle of the corridor, and through it I could see a DR store cupboard. But those DRs were all switched off. So, it was just me and them. One against six. I've had worse odds.

Though not often, and I didn't always win.

"Kiss my finger," I told the six mollyfockers, calmly and quite politely.

"I scorn your authority, bitch," said Seven Foot Giant, which was the gravest of insults for someone of my (alleged) Clan rank.

¹³ True. – *Ed.*





22 PHILIPPALMER

“Does your penis,” I asked, still using my calm and polite voice, “look really odd? I mean, disproportionately small, compared to the rest of your lumbering frame?”

“I scorn your authority,” he repeated.

“And how do you cope with doors? I mean, do you have to like *stoop*?”

“I scorn your authority, and call upon you to defend it,” he said for the third time, clearly struggling to keep himself in check. But these proprieties have to be observed.

“I defend my authority,” I said, and that was the cue for the fighting to begin.



Ten minutes later I walked out of the womb into Spoke A.

My shoulder was stiff, from throwing a really awkward punch. My ribs hurt. My hands hurt. And I had the mother of all headaches. But, of course, I acted as if nothing untoward had occurred. I walked into the Spoke A rec room and picked up a magazine and started to read it. It was a geek mag, full of racy images of ion drives and rocket engines, with a little section on how to solar surf, and a centrepiece spread about building up abs without rejuve.¹⁴

Half an hour later a platoon of DRs arrived to arrest me for my breach of prison discipline. They stomped me through the Spokes, manacled and collared, their blank silver faces conveying all the contempt and rage that their human handlers could muster.

In the scuffle which had preceded this moment, I had managed to cripple and kill all six of Shalco's crew. Seven Foot Giant now had a broken skull and no eyes, and was

¹⁴ Despite extensive research, I have not been able to identify this magazine. There are, however, many like it in the marketplace. – *Ed.*





admitted to the prison hospital with no heartbeat either.¹⁵ Oh, and his scimitar was broken. I had kept a shard of it as a memento. The other five were battered, broken, and also dead.¹⁶

None of them were true-dead, however – I was too skilful for that. And there was no camera footage of the fight of course. But dozens of prisoners had watched the combat through the hardglass doors, and clearly one or more of them had been coerced into stoolpigeoning.

And so now I was due to endure a month in solitary confinement, as my punishment for fighting other prisoners without sanction, and with excessive force.

I was looking forward to it.

You see, these days I get twitchy and restless when there are too many other people around me. I prefer wide open spaces; or failing that, small cramped spaces, and my own company. I'm sorry, that's just the way I am. These days.

Besides, I needed to recuperate. My hands were badly bruised, though the knuckles were unbroken. My skull however was fractured. And at some point during the fracas I'd been stabbed in the liver. But my healing factor had already kicked in. In a few weeks I would be, as my father used to say, much to my irritation, "as right as rain".

You know, that phrase used to drive me mad!

One time, when I was a kid I mean, I burst into tears in front of my father when he was putting me to bed. And my father had looked at me in horror. Until, much to his relief, he realised he had the solution to my problems. An aphorism! "Go to

¹⁵ Prison hospital records confirm that Marshall Jo Shane, an extremely tall felon who was a diagnosed psychopath, was admitted with these injuries on the day to which Artemis refers. – *Ed.*

¹⁶ Prison hospital records confirm this. The five other prisoners were: Lucius Mantian (black skinned, depilated scalp), Jana and Jora Priash (ninja-trained Noirs who were sisters), Andrew Jones (a large man of little aesthetic appeal, with a skin condition), and Jonjo Jesus, a three-eyed Golgothan. – *Ed.*





24 PHILIPPALMER

sleep,” he had told me, with a big smile on his face, “and in the morning, you’ll be as right as rain.”

Hey! I don’t know why I just told that story. Not very relevant, huh?¹⁷ Move on, Artemis, tell the tale.

So, long story short: I was feeling pretty good about myself after the fight in the prison womb. My reflexes hadn’t let me down. My fighting skills were still second to none. Only the thin red line on my throat betrayed how close I’d come to being decapitated and thus experiencing true-death in those first muddled lightning-swift moments of the *mêlée*.

Picture it:

There I am, licking my lips anxiously, fear in my eyes, as I walk towards Seven Foot Giant and his ugly pals. They read my seemingly fearful body language and they relax, just slightly. Enough to give me my edge.

Seven Foot Giant lunges first, trying to impale me with his sword. So I duck down low, come up with a punch to the ribs. His sword’s backswing catches my throat a nick and I see a spurt of blood – yeah, that was the worst moment. But I give his body a tug and momentum propels him onward and the sword takes a slice from the skull of Big Black Bald Guy.

More blood spurts, but not mine this time. Seven Foot Giant is wheezing, the broken ribs have punctured his lung and I’m behind him and I leap up and catch his head in my hands and twist to one side. Broken vertebra, and I’ve managed to gouge his eyes out too. He falls like a building being demolished and I push off his body and fly up in the air and kick Three Eyes with both my heels on his chin. The impact rocks me, but it rocks him even worse. That’s Big Black Bald Guy down, Seven Foot Giant down, and Three Eyes dazed and confused. Big Ugly Motherfucker, however, is biding his time. He will be trouble, I predict.

17 No, it’s not. – Ed.





ARTEMIS 25

Then the Noirs come at me. They are elegant and achieve perfection in their every graceful movement. By contrast, I am a savage pit bull hound at bay. Elbows and heels and head butts, those are my weapons of choice. I keep it close, their finesse doesn't get a look in. I break their skulls because I know their sinuous bodies will constantly evade me. But grab a head with both hands and butt it and you can't miss.

The head butts hurt me like hell – that's when I broke my own skull – and it sure ain't *kata*. But the Noirs are down and weeping now.

Then Big Ugly Motherfucker makes his move, and he is fast, very fast indeed. His punch misses my head by a fraction, and I know that if his fist had connected my skull would have exploded. But it didn't, and it doesn't, for I am even quicker than he is. And I keep moving and snap back, and deliver a punch to his balls and an elbow strike to his head. This slows him down considerably. Then I punch him in the chest and his heart stops and he dies.

As he falls, his ugly face is consumed with disbelief. Here is a man, I guess, who has never lost a fight before.

Three Eyes is still in the fight though, as is Seven Foot Giant, despite his terrible injuries and his blindness. But that's to the good, 'cause he's just lumbering around now, getting in the way of the unconcussed fighters. I fall on the floor and weave like a snake and flip Three Eyes and Seven Foot Giant off their legs then savagely strike and kill them when they're down.

The Noirs are also back in the fight but slower now. And I get faster and my form becomes perfect. I am a *karate-ka* with open hands and a mind empty of confusion now. This bit would look beautiful if you could see fast enough to follow the different moves. Knife hand, claw thrust, side kick, roundhouse kick, kick-while-leaping, somersault, body twist, the whole repertoire. Savage strike to the face of the assailant in front, duck and weave and backheel to the rear to smash the head of the mollyfocker behind. Then repeat. And repeat, and repeat.





26 PHILIPPALMER

And then, like shadows struck by sunlight, the Noirs are no more.

Ten minutes five seconds, and the fight is over. At the end of the combat, I am still standing and they are all clinically dead, but kept brain-alive by the oxygen capsules in their brains. There are stars in front of my eyes, and my heart is pounding so fast I fear I will stroke out.

Then I press the button for the gateway to open and I stroll, as I've already said, through.



My trial was brief. I wasn't allowed a lawyer. The holo of Prison Governor Ferguson appeared, heard the charges, and passed the sentence. One month's solitary to cool me down, plus twenty years additional moral rehabilitation therapy. (Yeah, that last bit really *did* scare me.)

As they dragged me to the Solo Cells, I howled in triumph: "VICTORY!" So the whole prison block would know what happened.

But then my troubles really began.



I had thought, you see, that it was all going to be plain sailing once I was in solitary. I would take my supposed punishment, actually a holiday for someone like me, then re-emerge refreshed and ready for Phase 2 of my plan.

I didn't think I would actually be *punished* by the prison authorities. It didn't, for pity's sake, even occur to me that such a thing might happen.

Because those days were gone! Or so I had been told. And so it was declared on all the news portals, and in the prison



**ARTEMIS 27**

documentation. The days of beatings, sensory deprivation, brainthrasing, and cruelty beyond belief. The days of the Corporation regime, when Giger was a dungeon, not a prison.

THESE days every prison had a Specialist in Prisoner Welfare advising the staff on how to respect the human rights of the scumbag inmates. Even major infractions of the rules – drug-dealing, rape, murder – were liable to incur the mildest of sentences. A telling off. A brief period of solitary. A few more ghastly mornings sitting in a circle with fellow sinners repenting and vowing to be more empathetic from now on. But nothing that’s actually going to hurt.

Thus, I had reasoned, all I had to do was tough it out for a few weeks. Sit in a cosy cell playing mental chess with myself. Then when I emerged I’d be Queen Bee of Giger. My rep would be secured. And I could do my deal with Shalco, prior to launching my escape bid.

That, as I say, was the plan.



They didn’t bother with shackles. They didn’t even slo-mo me. They just led me into the punishment block; and then they attacked me.

The blow was fast. I didn’t even feel the air behind me stir and suddenly I was on the ground, bleeding from my ears. My skull was fractured in several more places. I could hear a roaring sound, like the wind whistling through my eye sockets. I got to my feet. The DRs took a step back. One of them had blood on its metal fist.

“Cruel and unusual punishment,” I told them coldly, “is now barred under the laws of the SN Government. It is also an offence to—”

All three DRs moved, but this time I was ready for them. I threw one DR against a wall, struck the second in the neck,





28 PHILIPPALMER

dislocating its power supply. And failed to see the sucker punch from the third.

I went down. A powerful hand picked me up.

“You can’t do this,” I explained.

And then a fist hit me in the face. And all the cheek and jaw bones whose graceful harmony of parts made me look like *me* were shattered and crushed by a single violent robot’s punch. The DR smiled, an eerie silver smile, and opened its mouth. In the mouth were metal fangs. I groaned inwardly.

I tried to strike back, but the DR caught my hand and broke my fingers so I could not make a fist. And then it—



No more.

I took a beating, that’s all that needs to be said. Every bone in my body was broken. Then acid was poured upon my body. Then the sprinkler came on and sprayed salt water on my fleshless dying carcass.

But none of this really happened. It was all in my mind.

What *really* happened was that I was led, shackled and hobbled, into the punishment block; and at some point during my journey a sedative dart had been injected into my body, causing me to lose consciousness and wiping my short-term memory.

Then my body was taken to the lab and wired up to the brainthrasher. The reality simulation machine that is used to administer violent punishments to criminals and rebels alike.

They used to call it the “brainwiper”, and it can indeed be used for that. To erase memories, to rebuild personalities by implanting false experiences. But more usually it’s used to inflict pain. A myriad types of pain. Pain so intense that the hapless offender will (out of sheer despair and desperation) find remorse in his or her black soul, and henceforward turn over a





ARTEMIS 29

new leaf. Only to find that the pain does not cease. Repentance is not an option.

It's torture without physical damage. There's no limit to the amount of agony you can inflict on a victim, because **THEY CANNOT DIE**.

Within thirty seconds of taking that first punch, I knew this was a simulation, and so I settled in to endure it.

But it took longer, much longer, than I expected or could endure.



Time manipulation, you see, is the cruellest of tricks. If you can alter a person's inner chronology, then a second can be made to last an eternity.

In reality, I spent only two days in the brainthrasing device. That's how long it took them to realise their error. And that's not long at all, not really.

Because, fortunately, help was on its way. For the moment I'd concluded the fight with Teresa Shalco's goons, I'd sent a signal via my Rebus chip to Dekon, alleging malpractice at the Giger Penitentiary. Alarm signals had been sent to the SN Government. And this meant the Recon Committee would soon be on the case, anxious as always to protect their precious 'human rights'. This was my failsafe strategy – for I've always been cautious to the point of paranoia when I know my arrest is imminent.

And thus, it only took two days for the Recon Committee to come to my rescue. Two days! Before a doppelgänger bureaucrat touched down and ordered my release.

But in my mind, those two days were two hundred long, terrible, agony-filled years.

I used all the survival tricks I had learned in my time with Baron Lowman to ameliorate my agony. I blanked out the





30 PHILIPPALMER

world, and all my sensations. Dwelled upon my happy memories. Schemed terrible revenges. Conjured up music in my mind. Tried, quite simply, not to actually *mind* what was happening, as the hallucinations became increasingly more vivid and painful and gothically brutal.

Eventually, as I was being quartered – my legs and arms wrenched off my body by straps fastened to a wheel which was being turned by my OWN BLOODY FATHER – the pain suddenly stopped.

“You’re free to go,” said the DR and I realised I was sitting in a chair fastened to wires. The DR unhooked me. I tried to stand, and then I swooned.

Yeah I did. I actually passed out, aka fainted, aka “swooned”.

Being flogged, hung, drawn, eviscerated, quartered, and feeling the heat from the flames which are roasting your flesh – it can really take it out of you.



I swaggered into the rec room in Spoke A. An old looking guy with a bald head and facial wrinkles eased up to me.

“Take a seat,” he said.

“I’m fine,” I told him.

“Take a seat.”

He had his hand on my arm. He eased me over to a bench. I sat down. I felt my vision start to swim. I wanted to cry.

“Head up, look proud, don’t let the bastards get to you,” the old guy said.

“I’m fine.”

“You’re not fine. You look like shit. Don’t let the Clannites see you like this. Take a minute. Take ten. Eat this.”

He passed me a square of something brown. Chocolate. I ate it. It tasted of nothing. I remembered the taste of ash. I remember eating my own—





No! I forced myself back into present reality.

“Who are you?” I asked suspiciously.

I ate a bit more chocolate. This time it tasted more like chocolate. A lifetime of memories came flooding back. I’d eaten this stuff before. Hadn’t I?

But . . . when? I couldn’t remember.

“My name’s Billy,” said the old guy. “I’m a trusty. I’ve been where you’ve been.”

“My name is—” I said, and realised that I had forgotten the details of my assumed identity.

“I know who you are.”

That made one of us.

“Billy, will you—?” I said, and couldn’t think of the next word.

He waited patiently.

I shook my head. I couldn’t remember the words. Any words.

He offered me a glass of water. I sipped it. It refreshed me.

I felt a surge of delight. *That* was what I had meant to say. I had been thirsty, and wanted a drink.

I sipped again.



“Who are these people?”

Billy had led me through wombs and rooms that I didn’t recognise, into a dining hall I had never seen before. A high vaulted chamber where silent men and women sat, staring into the far distance.

“Political prisoners, by and large,” said Billy.

“There are no political prisoners,” I said scornfully. “Not any more. They were released after—”

“Some of them wouldn’t go.” Billy nodded at a old grey-haired man with blind staring eyes. “Carter Broderick. Leader of the June Revolution.”

I stared at the old blind man.





32 PHILIPPALMER

“Broderick is dead,” I said, stunned.

“That’s the story that went out on the news.”

“*That’s* him?”

I stared at Broderick. He stared back at me. A stare that haunted me for years after.

“Two hundred and fifty years in the brainthresher,” said Billy.

“There’s not much of him left. But that’s him.”

“Is he bitter?”

“Beyond bitter.”

“Mad?”

“Beyond mad.”

“He’s a hero,” I said. “A genuine hero. Some say greater than Flanagan.”

“Flanagan was a chancer. Carter Broderick was an idealist.”

“You followed him?”

The bald guy laughed.

“Nah. I fought him. I was a Space Marine. I served the Corporation loyally.”

“So what are you doing here?”

Billy spat. An affectation of his. “I served the Corporation loyally,” he said bitterly. “A lot of us ended up here, after the Last Battle.”

“There were amnesties, weren’t there?”

“Not for the ones like me. Not for what *we* did.”

I looked at Billy again. He was old and had skin that was weathered and worn, but he carried himself with the special grace of the true warrior.

“Were you a Soldier, with a capital S?”

He glared at me.

“Nah. Wash your fucking mouth out. I was a volunteer. Not a zombie. I made my choice, and stuck with it. We all did. Back in those days.”

“Why are you helping me, Billy?”

“It’s what I do,” said Billy, grinning shyly. “I help people, if I think they can help *me* in some way.”





“In what way?”

“I want to escape.”

“Escape is impossible,” I explained.

He grinned at that.

“You don’t need to be so fucking coy,” he said, “There’s no surveillance in this room. It’s considered to be a breach of their human rights. These aren’t prisoners, you see. They’re just – well, they just won’t leave. So you can speak frankly. Will you take me with you?”

“What makes you think I’m planning to escape?”

“I know. I know your sort. And I know what you did to those guys. You’re on your way out of here, and I can help.”

“I don’t need help.”

“Of course you need help.” Billy smiled. He was holding something back.

“Give,” I said.

He gave: “They’re planning to kill you tonight,” he said. “Shalco and her people. In your cell. They’ve bribed a dubber. A DR will come into your cell at midnight and force your tongue down your throat. They’ll call it suicide.”

“How do you know?”

“I’m the lookout.”



This was Billy’s story.

He really *was* an old-timer. He’d been a green recruit during the Loper Insurgency, and a veteran with fifty years experience when Earth was invaded by Peter Smith. He’d fought, of course, on the losing side, but quickly switched allegiance.

Billy was a hundred and twenty-five years old when America rebelled. He was at the Siege of Beijing. By the time he was two hundred, he’d quelled forty-five uprisings and was awarded a Purple Heart after losing his legs and eyes in the Belt War.





34 PHILIPPALMER

Billy was the laconic sort. "What was it like?" I asked him one time. "Serving the Galactic Corporation?"

"I didn't," he said. "I worked for the army."

"You served in the Marine Corps. The Marines were fully owned by the Galactic Corporation."

He shrugged at that. "I worked for the army. I did what they asked me to do."

"You never had, like, moral qualms?"

"Nope."

"Never?"

"Never."

"How many people did you kill, Billy?"

"We don't keep score. It's not a game."

"Ball park."

He thought about it. "Couple of million," he hazarded.

"Couple of million?"

"Not counting entire planets. Just enemy combatants killed in action."

"*Millions.*"

"You asked for ball park."

"I did," I conceded.

Billy had been a doppelgänger rider and pilot. One of the best.

This was after he'd lost his legs and his eyes of course. His army insurance covered the cost of limb and organ rejuve. But that meant ten years with stumps, walking in an exoskeleton, viewing the world through artificial eyes, before the legs and eyes grew back. But he was still fit for virtual duties.

The truth, you see, and ignore whatever you've heard elsewhere, is that doppelgänger robots really AREN'T that scary. They're strong, for sure, and vicious, without a doubt. But also slow. Operated by amateurs and volunteers with no real idea how to fight. *Most* of the time.

But for the serious action engagements, in the days before Soldiers were bred, the doppelgänger department used crippled





and aged Marines to ride their robot bodies and spaceships. That's how they enforced order on the ten thousand and more colony planets in which the Corporation held the majority shareholding.

"What was it like?" I asked.

Billy smiled. Memories of his doppelgänger days always lit a spark in his soul.

"It's like," he said, "being God."

"In what way?"

"In every way."

"Where did you serve?"

"Cambria. Gullyfoyle. Pohl. New Earth. Weisman. Juno. Too many to name. All the trouble spots. We allowed an asteroid to hit Pixar, so we could re-terraform it and turn it into a theme planet. And Cambria had a big rebellion. The colonists lived underground, they came swarming out to attack the doppelgängers in their castles. I led the commando squad there. I could operate fifty, sixty robot bodies at once. I was stronger and faster than any human, because of my robot body. And smarter than any human, because I was a *Marine*. And I couldn't die. I fought wars, and I won 'em, sometimes single-handed. It's Marines like me that held the Galactic Corporation together."

Yeah, I have to concede, he wasn't *always* laconic.

"Cambria is where they raped the colonists," I said. "The DRs. Ritual rape, once a year. I read about it. There's a whole body of work about it."

Billy shrugged, and spat on the floor. Spitting, I realised, was his way of saying, hey, the fuck, did *I* make the universe?

"That happened lots of places," he said, "not my fault, not my responsibility. That was the Gamers. People paid the Corporation for a chance to do that shit. We stood guard, we didn't pay no one, we *were paid*. There's a difference, okay?" He stared at me belligerently. "I never raped no-one, not as myself, not in any robot body. I draw the line at that. I fought, I killed; that's all."





36 PHILIPPALMER

“But you quelled the rebellion. You made it possible for—”

“Don’t get philosophical on me.”

That was Billy’s response to everything. He didn’t like to think too deeply about things.

I liked Billy.

But the truth is, he was a monster. A mass murderer. A warrior who had helped sustain the most evil regime in the history of mankind.

That’s why he was in Giger. He was past redemption. But he had a simple code: do what you do ’cause it’s what you do, and do it well. That’s all that mattered to him.

Billy wasn’t, in my view, a bad man. He wasn’t, in any sense, evil. He just lived by his code. Never looked outside it.

I know a lot of people who are like that.

Me, for instance.



That night the DR came to kill me.

I didn’t sleep at all of course. I just lay down in my bunk, allowing my muscles to relax, gathering my strength for the fight to come.

I had locked the door. But I knew that wouldn’t make a difference. You can’t keep DRs out of a prison cell; they have a shortband lock-override facility. Even I couldn’t lock the door against them.

I had also turned the light off. It was pitch-black, and I had my eyes closed. So that I could focus on sounds more intently.

There were no screams of pain that night. No one left their cell. Everyone knew what was going to happen.

So I waited and listened, in the pitchest of darks.

Then the cell door opened, soundlessly. Except no movement is truly soundless.

The DR entered, pacing forward slowly on its metal feet.



**ARTEMIS 37**

Again barely any sound was made. But my heightened hearing could hear the CRASH CRASH CRASH of footsteps.

Then the DR lunged and stabbed at my bunk but I was no longer there. I was clinging to the ceiling by my hands and bare feet, using my fingerspikes and heel spikes to grip the hard-plastic.

I had my eyes wide open now, and with my night vision I could see the robot's spectral silhouette. A body shaped like a human being but seven foot tall and with two extra arms fitted to cattle-prod inmates.

The DR looked up and saw me roosting like a bat, and abandoning all pretence at stealth it fired two plasma bolts up at me.

But I was in mid-air. Leaping, arcing, turning. Then I swept down with my two fingerspikes extended and slit open the machine's metal head. Then landed on its back and burrowed a finger into its electronic brain.

My two middle fingers, I should explain, are built up of erectile bone. They are undetectable to scanners. But when extended, they form a cutting tool of remarkable sharpness. DRs are designed to withstand bullets and missile blasts of less than six krismas. But if you have a tool sharp enough, you can open 'em up like a tin can. So I gouged and dug, and eventually plunged my right fingerspike into the main control chip and scattered the circuits with surgical precision.

The killer robot was turned into useless scrap in moments.

Then I got back into bed and waited for the next one. It never came.

In the morning the DR carcass was silently removed.

And I was called to see the Deputy Governor, Sheila Hamilton. Escorted by DRs. Led to the Holo Hall, where the DG's image glared at me with contempt.

I raised the middle finger of my right hand to her. Without the fingerspike extended.

"I wanna make a complaint," I said truculently.

"You destroyed a robot officer!" she said accusingly.





38 PHILIPPALMER

“It was trying to kill me,” I countered.

“That’s impossible!”

“Then what,” I asked gently, “was it doing in my fucking cell?”

She had no answer to that.

Two days later the Recon Committee representative returned and interviewed me. I told him that the DR had attempted to kill me in the night, and that I’d acted entirely in self defence. I also explained that all the prison officers were being bribed by the Clannites who ran the prison. Giger was utterly corrupt, I told him.

My story was believed. The prison was fined for failure to exercise its duty of care towards an inmate.¹⁸ I was even granted privilege points, redeemable at any point between now and the expiry of my sentence. These entitled me to extra hours in the gym, and additional time with my moral therapist.¹⁹

Yeah, my heart skipped a beat at THAT bit of news.



That’s the story of how I killed a DR, single-handedly, and with no weapons aside from my claws. And it’s all true, just the way I told it.²⁰

But did I mention how afraid I was that night? How terribly and soul-quakingly afraid?

Yeah, okay, I was warned in advance that the DR would come for me. And yeah, I was ready for it.

But even so, I was terrified.

¹⁸ Prison financial records confirm this. – *Ed.*

¹⁹ There’s no documentary evidence for this, but it is doubtless true. – *Ed.*

²⁰ I have not detected a single significant factual error in Dr McIvor’s account, much as I have striven to do so. Her opinions, however, are often extremely tendentious. – *Ed.*





I wasn't afraid of *dying*, get that, okay? Death holds no terrors for me. That's the way of my kind. People like me, the gangsters, the criminals, the killers for hire, we hold to the Viking way. We don't believe in death and glory, like the Soldiers, we just don't cling to life. That's what makes us so very good at killing others.

No. I was afraid of failing *in my mission*.

'Cause I knew I would only have once brief moment in which I could disable the robot's brain. And I knew that if I fucked it up, I would be killed outright. True-dead killed. And in consequence, my revenge would be aborted. My reason for living, my reason for *being*, would be gone.

That was my fear. The fear that when my moment came, I would be proven unworthy of it.

And this isn't, I hasten to add, me bragging in reverse. I'm not one of those warriors who coyly admits she *sometimes* feel fear, knowing damn well that most ordinary citizens are shit-scared *all* the time. I hate that kind of mindfuck – the false modesty *shrick*.

No, what I'm saying is that I feared I would fail and hence prove unworthy – because it's happened to me before. Not often – only once in fact – but it's happened.

And I can still remember, with a terrible vividness, the occasion when that occurred. When my life was destroyed because of my astonishing, pathetic failure to act. I could have fought! Or tried to escape. *But I failed to do so*. Inertia had possessed me.

And I know that such a moment of weakness could occur again. Easily. And that awareness haunts me like – well, like nothing at all I can think of. It just haunts me, and renders me permanently afraid.

Anyway! I just thought I should mention that. So you know the truth about me. My inner fears. My weaknesses. All my frailties. I owe you that, okay?

But even so – despite my soul-quaking fear – I fought and





40 PHILIPPALMER

killed the evil, gigantic doppelgänger robot with nothing but my bare hands and claws.

How fucking cool was *that*?



“Teresa,” I said.

Shalco stopped, and stared at me.

We were in the prison yard. Every prison has a yard, but this one was bleaker than most. A narrow walkway on the outer edge of the spoke. There was rough gravel underfoot. The space wasn't wide enough to play a game of football, even if the dubbbers had had the wit, or the generosity, to give us a ball. And outside – nothing but bleak airless wilderness. The craters and mountains and empty dust-strewn landscape of Giger's Moon.

And that's where I called out Teresa Shalco, *capobastone* of Giger Pen.

“You look like shit,” she said. She was smiling again, looking like everyone's favourite momma.

I knew her history. She'd run the Russian gangs on the planet of Gorbachev. Everyone who knew her spoke highly of her fairness. She was cruel, yes, a killer, yes. But fair. You couldn't ask for a better Boss. She'd been ideally suited for the role of liaising with the doppelgänger ruling élite on her home planet. Because everyone trusted her, and yet she could kill without conscience.

And in fairness, she'd done a good job, back there on Gorbachev. Okay, many died because of her, but they would have died anyway. At least she organised her people into some kind of civilisation. She was a collaborator, for sure, but back in those days, the ones who didn't collaborate were either dead or trapped in Giger and places like it with their brains burned out.





ARTEMIS 41

All that was the ancient history about Shalco. Right at that moment, however – prison yard, airless wilderness stretching out eerily beyond, me staring nastily – the issue was that Shalco was the top bitch here. And it was my job to goad her into losing control.

“You ran to Mummy, did you?” I sneered. It was the gravest of allegations. That she had informed on me to the prison authorities.

“Never,” she said coldly.

“You told them I killed that robot.”

“It was obvious,” she said politely, “that you killed the god-damned robot. It was in your fucking cell!”

“Kiss my finger,” I said and held out my middle finger. She stood still, stared at me. This was sacrilege; for me to do this to *her*.

I laughed. Turned my back on her. And walked away.

I could feel her hatred burning after me. But she daren't attack me. Not here. Not in front of the DRs. So she had to let my insubordination ride.

Shalco was of course diminished by my actions. She had lost status in the eyes of all who saw us together. Which was only two or three people, but they all had big mouths. And so, sooner or later, to redeem her honour, she had to fight me *mano a mano*.

Either that, or acknowledge that I was the new leader of Giger Penitentiary.



Prisons are like cities. The rules are the same. The hierarchies are the same. It's just the quality of the booze that's different.

And I know what I'm talking about here, right? Cities and prisons, I know 'em both.

(I'm digressing here, by the way. Stick with me, I like to





42 PHILIPPALMER

snake my way around to the point. In fact, I remember one time.)²¹

Anyway, back to the actual digression.²²

I killed three *piccioti* in the ensuing brawl. That made *me* a *piccioto*. And a legend. I was seventeen years old, in biological terms, by that point. No longer a child. But still – yes, still – a virgin.

So I knew about prisons. And I knew how to work the system in Giger. Swagger, brag, taunt, and build a myth. That way, I would be top bitch in no time.

What's more, Shalco's people on the outside had access to my criminal record, which was dark and devious. I was, supposedly, a psychopath, and a multiple murderer.

In reality, I *was* a multiple murderer, and quite probably a psychopath to boot.²³ But my fake criminal record had different victims listed, and different motives. And I have to say, this girl I was pretending to be – Danielle Arditti – was a total fuckin' monster. In the old days she'd have been executed, or

21 This is a digression within a digression – *de trop!* – so I've edited it out. – *Ed.*

22 I've edited this out too. It's quite an enjoyable but rather bloodthirsty and graphic account of Artemis's arrival on Gullyfoyle, as a naive sixteen-year-old girl (not counting the two years in hiber). The gist of her tale, which I've excised, is that she'd gone into a bar, bright eyed and bushy tailed, and had become extremely drunk. Then she fell in with some bad company and got even drunker. And then a very bad man had taken her back to his room where he attempted – with the assistance of several large companions – to rape her. This was a mistake because Artemis, possessed as she was of exceptional augments and remarkable martial prowess, killed them all with her bare hands. The would-be rapists were however Clan-connected, so Artemis was subsequently arrested and convicted of murder and spent a year (the maximum term for murder in those days) in a Gullyfoyle jail, where she learned about prison hierarchies and how to play the system, which is the point of this anecdote. To clarify the chronology for the benefit of inattentive readers: on her release from prison at the age of seventeen, she became a barmaid, and that part of her story will be recounted later. Since none of this is directly relevant to the main narrative I have junked it all and picked up the story at the point where Artemis survives an attack by some thugs in prison, namely on the line: "I killed three *piccioti* in the ensuing brawl." If you don't read footnotes but had merely continued reading the text, you might have found that segue somewhat confusing; but that does rather serve you right! – *Ed.*

23 Not so. Artemis feels remorse for some (though not all) of her many killings, which psychopaths would never do. – *Ed.*





promoted to Admiral in the Cheo's Navy. These days, lifetime incarceration is the preferred way of dealing with nutjobs like her. Or rather (since she was dead) me.

Two days had passed since I'd offered my finger to Teresa Shalco. I lived those days with my senses at their highest pitch. Expecting a knife in the back. Or poison in my food. Or – well, the possibilities were endless, and I was alert to them all. But I'm a hard girl to ambush. And my taste buds are pretty acute – another genetic modification – so I can detect most poisons in my mouth before I actually swallow them.

But my point here is – you don't know what it's like to live like that! In a state of constant fear. Worried that everyone who passes by may be plotting murder. Afraid to take a shower in case it will be the setting for a brutal execution. I took to carrying a sharpened chess piece as a weapon. I knew that everyone in the prison was my enemy and I lived every moment in terror.

No, you don't know what that's like.

It's *great*. It's the adrenaline rush to beat all adrenaline rushes. I have no fear of death, you see. And that liberates me. It allows me to be truly alive.



Bargan Oriel came to see me, and offered a deal.

"Back down," he suggested. "Go on one knee, kiss Teresa's finger stump, beg for her forgiveness. And then it'll be fine. She'll forgive you."

"And in return?"

"There is no 'in return'," Oriel said coldly.

"I capitulate, she grinds my face in the dust. *That's* your deal?"

"Pretty much," Oriel admitted. "Take it or leave it."

"I leave it."

"You're a foolish girl, Danielle," Oriel told me.





44 PHILIPPALMER

I seethed at that – I hate being ‘girled’ – and resisted an urge to beat his face to a pulp.

“How *exactly* am I a foolish girl?” I asked Oriel, with a girl-ish flick of my hair, and a girl-like twinkle in my girl-sized eyes.

“You could be a *vangelista* in Giger,” he told me, in the same patronising tone. “I have the power to acknowledge your status. But you have to stop rocking the boat.”

“And if I don’t?”

Oriel sighed. His face assumed an expression of patient forbearance. “Then bad things will happen to you,” he said.

“Bad things have already happened to me,” I said lightly. “I’m used to it.”

Oriel eyed me up. It was a possessive glance. This was clearly a man who had owned a lot of slaves and fucked a lot of whores in the course of his long and badly lived life.

“The entire prison population,” he pointed out, “answers to the *capobastone*.”

“How would *you* like to be *capo*?” I asked him, and for a moment Oriel’s eyes lit up. I could see his excitement, his almost sexual longing for power.

Then he came to his senses.

“Is this your plan?” he asked, with open scorn, though, at the same time, barely able to conceal his greed. “You’re trying to launch a coup? You want *me* to be the next boss?”

“Maybe,” I said, just to taunt him.

Sweet Shiva! It was like offering raw bleeding meat to a jackal.

The hooded expression returned to his face, eventually. “I am loyal to Teresa,” he said, in brittle tones. “Totally loyal.”

He was scared of me now. He’d guessed that I was playing a dark game. Either on my own behalf. Or, more likely, for Teresa Shalco, acting as an *agent provocateur* to lure him into being disloyal. I could be *her* way of testing *him* – by setting *me* up to provoke *her*, and then suborn *him* into treachery.

This entire complex chess game unfolded in his mind in an





instant, and now he had me marked as a real threat to his life and power.

None of it was *true* of course. But that's the great thing with paranoid people. You just have to give them a hint, and they create their own mad conspiracy thriller in their heads.

"Tell Teresa I want to see her," I said, and Oriel flinched. Only the five *quintini* were allowed to call Shalco by her first name.

"She won't see you," he said.

"Then send her a message."

"What's the message?"

"I challenge thee."

Oriel went pale.

I looked at his eyes. I could almost hear the thoughts whirring. Should he pass the message on or not? If he didn't, he might be failing some kind of test. If he did—

"I'll tell her that," said Oriel calmly, and I knew he was planning how he would seize power if and when I defeated Teresa Shalco.



We met in the rec room of A Spoke.

This was one of the few public areas in the prison which hadn't been attacked by the SNG interior designers. Instead of wishy-washy pastel coloured walls, there were jet black walls with, if you looked closely enough, dried blood stains. There was a stench of defeat and decay here. And it was the biggest rec room in the prison, more an amphitheatre really, with tiered seating. I didn't know what the former prisoners of Giger had done in this place, but it was a fair bet that death was involved. Maybe gladiatorial games? Or eviscerations and executions?

We had a full house. Every seat was occupied, and Shalco's goons were acting as stewards. I was wearing a T-shirt and





46 PHILIPPALMER

joggers. Shalco wore an old vest, with a slogan on it (DEATH TO MUTANTS, which I assumed was the name of a band or a TV show, though I didn't know for sure).²⁴ Her arms were bare and muscular. Her brown hair was tied back in a ponytail. She was a big woman, but I could see now how little of it was fat.

Shalco had the right to choose the manner of combat, and had elected to wrestle me. I would have preferred a sword fight – for with a blade in my hand, I'd have defeated her easily. Boxing would also have favoured me, because of my speed and grace and skill. But wrestling was Shalco's game. She'd been a pro fighter before she became a gang boss, and had won her partial freedom after sixty successful bouts to the death. And she still kept in shape.

She was about six feet four inches tall and I was five-five. She was built like a barn, and I was slight and slender. It was, on the face of it, a complete mismatch.

Oriel clapped his hands once and we circled each other.

I kept my hands high, boxing style. Shalco let her hands drop to her side, swaying as she first moved towards me, then stepped away. Her strategy was clearly to get me in a death grip. If she did, I doubted I could break it. I knew she was also augmented, and I'd heard she could bench press an army jeep.

I moved in fast with a flurry of punches and Shalco tried to catch me in a bear hug but I fell on the floor, slipped under her open legs, stood up, and toppled her.

She did a back somersault and landed on her feet and turned to face me. Fast and graceful, as well as powerful.

I threw a roundhouse kick at her head and it connected. But she caught my leg as I drew it back and now she had me. She

24 It's a band, famous briefly on Shalco's home planet of Gorbachev, of very little musical merit, but Shalco had a sentimental attachment to them because she had copulated with both the guitarists whilst she was a young and impressionable "rock chick". Prisoners at Giger Penitentiary were not of course allowed to wear their own clothes, so Shalco's adoption of the T-shirt was an infraction of the prison rules. *Mano a mano* fights to the death were also banned, under Prison Regulation 4 a (iii). – Ed.





ARTEMIS 47

twisted the leg and yanked and tried to pop it out of the hip socket. But my body bent like softplastic and I spun around and landed a two-fist strike to her face, breaking her nose.

She lashed out with an elbow strike to my face and the pain hit me. Then she threw me across the arena towards the ring pillar. I spun in the air and avoided a face-first collision with the metal post.

I got back on my feet and somehow Shalco had me in a neck hold. She really was fast. I forward rolled, as she broke my larynx, and then I turned and punched her between her breasts to stop her heart.

It didn't work. She grabbed me by the throat and began strangling me. I activated the oxygen capsule in my brain and pounded her arms which were like granite. She jackknifed me over and pinned my shoulders to the floor. Oriel began the count.

I jolted my body and threw Shalco off me. She flew about five feet in the air and I could see the look of total astonishment on her face. She'd had no idea I was so damned *strong*.

She recovered fast and turned the fall into a parachutist's controlled landing. But I leaped and grabbed her arm and spun her round and threw her to the ground and pinned her. Oriel counted it. Eight, nine, ten. First pinfall to me.

Shalco got to her feet, snarling. She'd never lost a wrestling bout, and she didn't like the way things were going. And so she lost her temper and came at me hard, with forearm strikes and vicious leg swipes.

I avoided them all, dancing around her, not hitting her but making her feel slow and old. Then I grabbed her in a hammerlock and twisted until I could hear her shoulder pop.

"Submit," I whispered.

She didn't. I knew she never would. I let her go and as she experienced a moment of joyous release I leaped across her body and spun her over then pinned her in a *la magistral*.²⁵

25 For explanations of these wrestling terms with animated images, click [here](#). – Ed.



48 PHILIPPALMER

Second pinfall to me.

Shalco got up, then simply leaped up in the air and landed on me. It felt as if a truck had descended from the clouds and crashed upon me when I had been out for a stroll anticipating mild rain. I'd no idea a human being could leap so fast, or fall so hard. Then she pushed up with her hands and flew upwards with arms outstretched and fell with what seemed like preternatural speed and landed upon me a second time.

This time, it felt like the truck's lardarse older brother had landed on me.

She raised herself up a second time and this time tried for a cradle pinfall, but I kicked free and rolled away. But she got me in a killer neck grip and whispered to me: "Let's deal."

I turned my head and looked into her eyes, which wasn't easy considering the agonising position I was in, and I nodded. But I couldn't speak, because she'd shattered my larynx, so I authorised a shortband MI transfer and spoke into her mind.

"What can you offer?" I said.

"Anything. What do you want?"

I told her.

Then I threw her off me and we battered shit out of each other for another hour and a half before I allowed her to pin me three times in a row.

What the hell – there was a crowd, they deserved a decent show.



That night in my cell I sat immersed in agony. It would take weeks for my throat to heal. Weeks too for my bruised limbs to stop hurting. I feared there was internal bleeding too. And my head hurt. One of those really painful headaches, you know? The kind you get when someone very strong punches you in the





face a great many many times in a very short period. *That* kind of headache.

But I was happy. Because the entire landing of the cell block was silent. The doors had not opened. There were no footsteps outside. There were no groans and screams and howls of pain. There were no atrocities at all that night, nor would there ever be again. That was my deal with Shalco: she stopped the rapes.

There were twenty-five other landings in Giger of course. And what happened on those other landings would continue to happen. That wasn't part of the deal – I knew I dare not ask for *that* much. So it was a partial victory. Bad stuff was still happening in Giger – but at least it wasn't happening near *me*.

All this, I should point out, had nothing whatever to do with my real reason for being in Giger Penitentiary. It wasn't part of my plan. This was just, well, something I felt I had to do.

The plan itself was far simpler.

I needed Teresa Shalco and her fellow Clannites to help me escape. They had the power. They had the prison officers in their pockets. And they had access to illicit contraband of all kind – including weapons and bombs. The only reason they didn't try to escape themselves is that, well, frankly, life for the Clannites at Giger was cushy. They had all the luxuries they could desire.

And they also had all the freedom they needed, or were used to. Because, of course, all the Clannites had been raised on slave planets. Captivity, for them, was just the way life was.

So they weren't *desperate*, as I was. Which is why I needed to incentivise them. By telling them about the horror that was soon going to be inflicted upon them.

And so that was my next task. To tell Shalco and her Clan leaders about the coming of the Exodus Universe.





50 PHILIPPALMER



I had a great job in the Giger Penitentiary. I worked in the prison library. What a joy *that* was!

Hey guys, bear with me here! This does connect up with the story, eventually.²⁶

I loved the work, because I adore books. More than anything. And I mean, literally, anything. Does that sound strange to you? A killer and a psychopath who likes to *read*?²⁷

I had paid heavily to get assigned this plum job. And during my time in Giger, I'm proud to say that I made some major improvements to their prison library system, mainly by re-cataloguing the entire collection on saner grounds. In other words, by genre and category rather than by a) date of publication or b) how much the librarian liked the book.

The library itself was a wood-lined room with hundreds of desks each with its own virtual screen and limited access to the remote computer's archive of books. If you had a personal reader, you could down the book and read it in your cell. But most users of the library sat at the desk and watched the book unfold in front of them in mid-air.

But when I say, "most users", that didn't exactly amount to a whole lot of people. The library was not a popular destination. Reading, after all, was considered in these space-faring times as being, well, archaic, and odd. Whereas on Rebus, books were a way of life.

And the prison library's book collection was, in truth, pretty pathetic. No science fiction. No heroic fantasy. No finely crafted contemporary novels about cultural mores and the state of

²⁶ It does, which is why I've allowed this digression. – *Ed*.

²⁷ Not really Artemis. In fact, it makes me think that – sorry, I'm talking aloud here. I do that, sometimes, when I'm reading. I answer the author's rhetorical questions, I shout out advice to the protagonist, and I— Sorry again! This is not meant to be about *me!* – *Ed*





society (thank the gods for small mercies!). No satire. No poetry. It was almost all emotionally gentle and well-intentioned pap. Fictional tales of nice people learning to be nicer.

In other words, crap.

But I, of course, could burrow deeper, with the power of my Rebus-chipped thoughts. So I “stole” several thousand volumes from the libraries on Giger and elsewhere, stored in the computer’s deep memory, to supplement my already vast implant library. Classics of literature from the nineteenth and twentieth and twenty-first and twenty-second and twenty-third and twenty-fourth centuries, as well of course as the great works from more recent centuries. Some were books I had read in the course of my boring childhood on Rebus. Most were books I always felt I should read. So I sat in the library and read them in mid-air, or downed them on to my personal mindslate to read at leisure in my cell or in the rec rooms. (This is how I developed a reputation for being a mad staring person.)

I also – this gets us back into the story – used my Rebus chip to down the Solar Neighbourhood Government ultra-confidential report²⁸ into the prison population problem. It was a bona fide report, I didn’t have to fake anything. All I changed were few words – “possible” became “definite”, “eventual” became “imminent”.

Then I gave the download to Teresa Shalco and Bargan Oriel. And I let them simmer.



They were appalled at what they read. And they swiftly realised it would mean the end of their whole way of life.

²⁸ I’ve read this report. It makes for chilling reading, and of course, prepared the ground for the subsequent Exodus Laws. Although, on the other hand, what *else* are and were we supposed to do with these truly evil people? – *Ed.*





52 PHILIPPALMER

For crime was about to be banned, totally and for ever.

This was a wild and crazy time, remember. The cork had been let out of the bottle and the genie was – whatever the fuck, let that metaphor die – it was a time of anarchy and gang violence.

It was forty years now since the death of the Cheo. That had brought to an end the longest Dark Ages in human history, according to some historians.²⁹

Other historians,³⁰ however, continued to argue these had been the Good Old Days. They argued that, because of the Corporation's libertarian polices, great works of art and wonderful acts of planetary engineering had been created. New planets had been colonised and terraformed. Rejuve had been perfected. Fabricator plants had been improved to such a degree that quality furnishings and beautiful designer clothes could be generated by self-replicating machines at next to no cost. And all in all, the quality of life for the few had been unsurpassably good. So did it really matter if billions of people on the colony planets lived in slavery and degradation?

I mean, what can you *say* to that kind of logic? How fucking stupid is – don't get me started!

Back to the point. In the “good old days” of the Corporation, the Earthian citizens routinely committed appalling crimes against humanity, and massacred alien monsters by the trillion.

But there was no crime, as such, back then. For why bother to break the law, when *obeying* the law was a better option for any greedy bastard with a soul of direst malignity?

There *was* rebellion, of course, and dissent, and liberal protest.³¹ But all those who defied the authority of the state in however minor a way were executed without trial. Or tortured,

29 In particular, Brosnan, Ennis, Goddard, and Mohammed. – *Ed.*

30 See in particular, Fleischer, Camre, Bamborough and Thomas. – *Ed.*

31 See *The History of Dissent during the Year of Corporation Hegemony* by Professor Gillian Tobin (Way Out of Orbit Books; for a discounted edition, click [here](#)). – *Ed.*





horribly, in dungeons like Giger.³² Lawyers³³ became a rarity, since there was literally no fucking justice in the world.

Now, however, supposedly, it is all different.

For in the years after the Last Battle, democracy has come to human-habited space. There's an incorruptible police force. There are fair laws. Peace and harmony reign. In theory.

In practice, however, there are a hell of a lot of very evil people out there. And so slowly the new rulers of humanity were realising they were fighting a losing battle. I read an academic paper about it: "*The Process of Moral Relativism; How Ten Generations of Human Beings Have Become Acclimatised to Evil.*"³⁴

It's scary, you see. If you live within a system, you absorb its values. Peer pressure can, I kid you not, create entire regiments of psychopaths. Let me give you one word to prove my point:

*Kristallnacht.*³⁵

None of which, of course, explains me – my murders, robberies, all the other stuff I've done – 'cause I'm the exception to the rule. I live in a system and I *defy* its fucking values.

Back to the report. It showed that prisons cannot cope. Brainwiping is proving less and less effective, blah, blah. And so a new solution has been found. Transportation of all major felons to terraformable planets in the farthest reaches of our universe, well away from "civilised" folk.

A thousand planets have already been identified. And the quantum teleportation technology needed to transport millions – no, not millions, *billions* of criminals is already in place.



32 See *Prisons and Dungeons Through the Ages* by Professor Wexford Gillingham (Way Out of Orbit Books; for a discounted edition, click [here](#)). – *Ed.*

33 See *Best Lawyer Jokes* ed. Rutherford Green (Way Out of Orbit Books; if you want to buy it, click [here](#) though personally I think you'd be wasting your money). – *Ed.*

34 See *Journal of Moral Crisis in the Modern Age*, vol. 4,344,333,222 , pp. 45–94. – *Ed.*

35 See *The History of World War II* by Professor Mark Jones. – *Ed.*





54 PHILIPPALMER

“What’s the catch?” asked Bargan Oriel.

I could see it appealed to him. The idea of getting out of prison and having his own planet, nay, his own *galaxy*.

I sighed. This was going to be tricky to explain.



If you want a physics lesson, ask a physicist. I’m just giving you the bare outline here, okay?

The slang term for quantum teleportation³⁶ is “the fifty-fifty” – because, duh, it only works fifty per cent of the time. When it does work, it instantly teleports human beings any distance you like into the far reaches of space. It works for space ships too. Fifty per cent of the time.

Those aren’t great odds. In fact, the odds are worse than they sound. For it may be that every colonist on a fifty-fifty ship survives the journey through entangled space but the ship’s hull becomes, for whatever random reason, porous. In which event, you will *all* die.

So that’s the catch: a toss of a coin will determine whether you live, or die in appalling horror and bodily incertitude.

Despite these crap odds, as I patiently explained to Oriel and Shalco, there’s already a volunteer scheme in place. But the Reconciliation Committee now have a plan to make the whole thing compulsory.

By teleporting entire prisons.

Well why not? Size isn’t an issue. If you can teleport a colony ship, you can do the same to a self-contained domed community. There are no dubbbers inside a dome like ours – all the prison officers and the Governor himself are safely outside in their vast Home Dome, several miles away from the

³⁶ See “The Principles of Quantum Teleportation” by Dr Mark Ruppe, Dr John Bompaso, and Professor Jean Everett, *Quantum Stuff*, vol. 3,344. – *Ed.*





Penitentiary itself. And of course, every prison has an energy supply and fabricators and oxygen synthesisers, and all the other gadgets you need to sustain a civilisation on a new planet. So you can simply teleport the prison on to an alien world, and let the scum inside cope as best they can.

What a great plan!

This news was not, however, well received by Shalco and Oriel. They still expected to get their freedom in due course, once their bribes kicked in. And they didn't care for the idea of their survival being subject to the whims of the quantum-teleport process.

And so their rebellion sprang up; and thus was born the great Giger Prison Riot.³⁷

Plans of the prison were downed by me from Dekon's mind and printed up for Shalco and Oriel to consult. Knives and grenades were smuggled in with their food packages. And the boxes which contained the food were dismantled to reveal hard-plastic components which, when carefully re-assembled, became mortars and plasma guns and force field jammers. And, as I pointed out to both Oriel and Shalco, the DRs all carry weapons, and *are* weapons. Their arm cannons and laser-eyes could be cannibalised to form the armoury for a mob of angry prisoners.

I suggested a date for the riot too. 1st June. That's when the prison was due to dematerialise, according to my modified research documents. At 14.00. Two weeks hence.

And those two weeks had passed. It was now the 1st of June.

Hence, the boiling hot water in the face, the girly screaming, and the riot.



³⁷ See *Hell Erupts: The Story of the Giger Prison Riot* by Sheila Hamilton (Way Out of Orbit Books; click [here](#)), and by the way, this book was ghostwritten by me!. (Hamilton was Deputy Governor of Giger before she was shot and almost killed in the riots). – Ed





56 PHILIPPALMER

I half-wish I had been there, in the main body of the prison, to see the violence erupt. Though I read plenty of accounts of the violence in the months that followed.

Here's my favourite:

Failed Escape from Giger's Moon

Government sources indicate that a small number of recidivist prisoners incarcerated in the Giger's Moon Penitentiary staged a violent protest which was swiftly subdued. Considerable damage to prison property was caused, and the cost of repairs and replacement of equipment and furniture will be charged to the offending prisoners to be redeemed via work in lieu.

An official of the Solar Neighbourhood Government has exclusively told this news portal: "This was a brief and regrettable lapse, which was quickly rectified. The public can be assured that there was never any chance of these wrong-doers escaping and returning to their life of crime."

However, in a wholly unrelated incident, the Governor of Giger Penitentiary Robbie Ferguson was fatally injured during a training exercise.³⁸

Well I mean! Whatever the fuck happened to the fucking gutter press? That's what I want to know!

There was a time when journalists would have had a field day with a story like this. Mobs of violent prisoners smashing DRs!

³⁸ © Giger Times. At the inquest into Governor Ferguson's death, however, the forensic team concluded that death was caused by two exploding bullets, one in his body, whilst he was working in his office. Prison authorities claimed live explosive ammunition was commonly used in routine staff training exercises. This apparently was believed by the credulous jury and a verdict of Accidental Death was recorded. – *Ed.*





Attempting to flee to the planet of Giger via the space elevator in the Industrial Zones! They almost succeeded too. All the prisoners needed was for someone on the outside to open the prison doors, and to provide them with the transport they needed to reach the space elevator on the Brightside and hence, achieve their freedom.

That someone was me.

Oops!



Go back to where we left off.

There's Cassidy and me, in the prison hospital, as the riot erupts in the main prison block. She's looking tense. And I'm looking – well, I'm looking at *her*, to be honest, transfixed by her beauty and her loyalty, as we wait impatiently for Governor Ferguson to open up the air vents.

And then he did! Four vents opened up in the wall of the corridor that led to the hospital's operating theatre. The atmosphere in the corridor starting gushing out; and before long the air in the entire hospital wing was being voided. The same thing was happening all over the prison. This was the prison authorities' secret weapon – for if you deny oxygen to the prisoners, all and any riots will soon come to an end.

But we'd *anticipated* this of course. Dekon, after all, knew all the prison security systems; and Dekon was under my control. Thus, all the ringleaders of the riot were equipped with oxygen cylinders to allow them to breathe in a vacuum. And the rest of the mob could³⁹ take refuge in the rec rooms, which had been made air-tight by us; and there they could wait, breathing slowly to conserve the oxygen, until the vents were closed.⁴⁰

³⁹ And did. – *Ed.*

⁴⁰ Which also occurred. – *Ed.*





58 PHILIPPALMER

And, as part of my augments, I had an oxygen capsule in my brain; while Cassidy had an oxygen tube, stolen from the infirmary, through which she could breathe freely.

So when the vents opened and the air gushed out, I was entirely unconcerned. I simply stepped forward and packed all four vents with mouldable explosive and stood well back.

The wall exploded. I had my eyes closed to protect them from the flare. When I opened them again, I saw that the explosion had left a large gaping hole that opened out on to the planet. Then Cassidy and I ran out into the icy airless nightmare that was the surface of Giger's Moon.



And for twenty appalling seconds it was incredibly fucking cold. But we ran and we ran, for eleven long and terrible yards.

Until we reached the force field corridor. The one that linked the prison with the Home Dome. It's invisible of course. But not to me, because I could see a blueprint of the prison in my visual array, courtesy of Dekon. Reality and map fused in my eyes, and we ran fast, and found ourselves in a zone of warm air and breathable oxygen.

And we carried on running. The corridor of breathable air was unpredictably winding. If you stumbled on it by chance, you'd have no hope of staying within it. But my mental map continued to show me the way, and we sprinted the three miles from the prison to the Home Dome with relative ease.

When we got there Cassidy took my hand in hers. We looked at each other. We had what I guess you'd call a "moment".

The moment ended. We looked at the Home Dome. It was painted a faint gold hue, and was beautifully inlaid with patterns copied by archaeologists from the alien manuscripts left behind on Giger's Moon millions of years before. No one had





ARTEMIS 59

ever translated this language. The hieroglyphs might, for all anyone knew, have said LITTERBUGS WILL BE PROSECUTED. But there was something haunting about the alien words etched on the hardmetal dome.

Then I mentally projected the access codes of the door and we were through.



We walked into a convention of burly Soldiers. Well, three of them anyway. They were passing the time in the way that brain-washed Soldiers generally do – namely, standing to attention whilst swapping grisly anecdotes about the many ugly alien fuckers they had killed.

And, naturally, they looked up as we blundered through the airlock, frozen and purple-overalled and clearly in the wrong place.

Within less than an instant their implants would have told them that we were not prison staff or authorised civilians and must therefore be escapees.

Although that was pretty fucking obvious – purple overall = convict, guys!

The three of them reached for their guns.

Cassady shot at two of them with her home-made anaesthetic gun, with dazzling speed, and almost hit them both. Whilst I took a deep breath, and went to work.

It was a brutal hand-to-hand encounter and I very nearly lost. But I had speed and surprise on my side, plus an airlock wrench. Afterwards, we stripped two of the bodies, dressed ourselves as Soldiers in body armour and shit-for-brains scowls. and proceeded onwards, at a brisk military walk.

I could now read the blueprint of the Home Dome itself in front of my eyes as I walked down the corridor. The shuttle bay was far down the corridor to the left, the Governor's office was





60 PHILIPPALMER

to the right. We carried straight on until we reached a large armoured door behind which, I knew, we would find the dop-pelgänger berths.

I tried ordering the remote computer to open the doors; no chance. I had considerable influence over Dekon, but I could not over-rule her high-security protocols. So I used the last of my mouldable explosive on the lock. We stood back. It blew. The door slowly slid open.

Inside was a dormitory full of dubbbers in trance, thirty or forty of them in all.⁴¹ They were wired up and slackjawed, a couple of them were dribbling. Oh, and there were two guards as well, but we took them down fast.

The prison officers were inhabiting the bodies of the dop-pelgänger robots who were subduing the riot in the prison.

I watched the warring dubbbers for a few moments, fascinated to imagine what was happening at the other end of their virtual link. Each of the forty-five⁴² prison officers was, I guessed, inhabiting five or more robot bodies at a time. There were twelve female dubbbers, eighteen male, and two herms. A couple of them were bodybuilders, but most were just ordinary joes, and janets. But in their virtual selves they were all-powerful robot monsters!

And to me they looked like – not that I'd even seen such a thing – a gang of teenagers having simultaneous wet dreams. Their bodies twitched uncontrollably, they groaned and grunted with effort as their robots bodies punched and kicked and shot prisoners.

“Danielle,” Cassidy warned me, and I stopped trying to imagine that which I could not see.

I disconnected the power, by smashing the wireless hub beneath a floor tile. And watched with delight as the dubbbers

⁴¹ Forty-five unconscious bodies were recovered from this room, plus two dead body-armoured guards. – *Ed.*

⁴² Artemis had clearly counted them by this point. – *Ed.*



**ARTEMIS 61**

woke up one by one. Only to be sent back into somnolence by Cassady and her dart gun.

Then I dug deep into Dekon and tried to capture control of the DR network. I did this by attempting to persuade her that I was authorised to replace the now-unconscious prison officers. She knew of course that wasn't true – Dekon had seen with her own camera-eyes what I had just done. But – how can I explain this? If you're a computer, you're not truly in control of your own mind. You are the slave of your sub-programs. It's a strange—

Enough of that. You don't need to know what it's like to be a sentient quantum computer. But trust me – I *do* know.

So I dumped one of the dubbers out of his chair and sat down. Cassady wired me up. Dekon finally gave me access to the doppelgänger robot network. And then Cassady took a gun and aimed it at the door in case the DRs or dubbers came upon us.

And then I became the doppelgänger robots. Not just the ones in the prison, those in the Home Hub itself. There were six hundred of them in all.

I became six hundred Mes!

That was far more Me than I could deal with. So I deactivated the four hundred and eleven DRs in the prison. The riot was now over; our side had won. Shalco and the others could proceed with the next stage in the plan, namely breaking out of the prison and escaping to the planet of Giger. All I had to do was drive the lunar buggies across to them remotely, and then open the doors of the prison dome.

First, however, I closed the air-vents in the prison dome, and seeped an atmosphere back in. I didn't want anyone asphyxiating if there was a delay.

Then I accessed the control nexus that would let me open the prison doors and allow Shalco and her gangsters to escape.

And finally, I took control of the doppelgänger lunar buggies; sixty in all, enough to take the entire escaping prison population and convey them to the Brightside space elevator.





62 PHILIPPALMER

Then I hesitated.

And I left the doors closed.

And I left the armoured buggies parked.

I betrayed, in other words, Shalco and all the other prisoners who had put their faith in me.

What can I say? I do that sometimes.

“All done,” said Cassidy.

“All done,” I said wearily. I always found this process tiring. Because I’m not a computer hacker, I’m an emulator. I emulate the peculiar state of existence of a quantum remote computer, in order to influence its functioning. It’s a bit like being an ant that thinks it’s a cloud. Or – whatever. I can’t explain.

Cassidy had by now switched on the wall screens and was reading the story of the prison break. The story was nothing. Nothing was happening.

“What the fuck is happening?” she asked.

“I can’t,” I said patiently, “let those bastards go.”

Cassidy looked at me in horror.

“You have to!” she said angrily.

“Sorry!”

“Those are my friends!” she protested.

Maybe so. But these guys were also, let’s face it, monsters. I couldn’t let them loose! I really couldn’t. I had no choice but to double-cross them.

“I’m not going to let them escape. You got a problem with that?” I asked Cassidy.

She looked at me warily. Then she shook her head.

“Let’s go,” I said.

We stepped out into the corridor – and were greeted with dazzling sheets of plasma fire. The remaining dubbbers were armoured up and ready for a prolonged siege. The walls behind us burned, fireballs danced in the air. We stepped hastily back into the doppelgänger room, tasting burned air in our lungs.

“Shit,” said Cassidy.





ARTEMIS 63

“No worries,” I said lightly. And I reached back into Dekon and thence into the body of the nearest deactivated DR.

And then I was back in the corridor, seeing through robot eyes, moving with a robot body.

The body-armoured dubbbers made their move. One of them had a grenade and he ran towards the door. I raised an arm and flame erupted from it and he went down.

The dubbbers turned and saw me and a fusillade of explosive bullets smashed into my robot chassis. I fired a hail of bullets then my shell collapsed and my circuits died.

But I was alive six more times. I saw through six pairs of eyes, I walked on six pairs of legs. And I ran down the corridor and rained bullets and flame upon the dubber squad. They were faster than me – because I had six minds to control. But my firepower was formidable. I left their dead bodies in the corridor and Cassidy and Artemis emerged from the doppelgänger suite and greeted us (all six of us) with whoops of joy.

We escorted them; and I was escorted *by* them, as I ran behind the robots. For I was seven minds, all at the same time. Once I stumbled, and Cassidy had to grab me and help me up.

Dekon sent me a warning – another dubber squad was closing in on us. So I stopped dead, and hunched down on the floor. And I reactivated another dozen robot bodies in nearby corridors and store rooms. And a dozen more. And a dozen more still. And I fought, and I fought.

When it was over, I got up and Cassidy and I walked down the corridors, past and over the bodies of the dubbbers, to the spaceport bay.

Cassidy was looking anxious. She didn't understand the necessity for my double-cross. Nor did she fathom why the DRs were helping us, or why I was acting so weirdly. She didn't understand anything really. I'd lied to her right from the start. She was just a pawn in my game. But at least she was safe now.

“Wait ten minutes,” I told Cassidy, “no longer.” She gave me an even more baffled look.





64 PHILIPPALMER

“Go, sweetheart,” I insisted.

She looked again. The kind of look that demands a kiss. But I did not yield to her.

“We stay together—” she began to say, but I interrupted her:

“Fucking go!” I said.

We separated.

I knew that Cassidy could get away from Giger’s Moon without me. She knew exactly what she had to do. And I now had a job to finish.

So I walked back down the corridors, past the dead bodies of the prison officers, and knocked on the door of the Governor’s office. No reply. I tried the door – locked. I ordered Dekon to open the lock and she wouldn’t. So I blasted the door down. Then I stepped inside.

I found the room in turmoil. Governor Robbie Ferguson was in the middle of the room, alone apart from three now-deactivated DRs. He appeared to be screaming at himself – in fact, of course, he was just too angry to subvocalise. He was barking orders via his MI down the beaconband to the authorities on Giger, apparently trying to call up a missile strike on the penitentiary.

He was so preoccupied that he didn’t notice me for a few priceless moments. So I stood there, and I watched him. Those bulging eyes, that brawny neck, the vein that pulsed in his temples when he was enraged. It brought back, oh, so many memories.

Then he realised there was someone in the room and he dropped the phone and reached for his gun.

I fired my plasma gun at the wall behind him. The wall hissed, and the pastel paint was burned away, leaving behind charred blackness. Ferguson was frozen in mid-draw. He decided instead to bargain, let go of the gun, and raised his hands.

“Remember me?” I asked Ferguson.





“Of course I do,” he said, as his brain chip gave him my name, “Danielle.”

“Try again,” I snarled.

He tried again. He stared at me. And stared even more.

I no longer in any way looked like the girl I once was. But there was *something* that he recognised, from his days as Chief of Police on a Clan planet. And the look of eventual recognition on his face was my reward for all the years of preparation.

“Fuck,” he said, feebly.

“Give yourself,” I suggested, “a second stab at your last words?”

“Maybe we can do a deal?” he wheedled.

“Okay,” I lied, but I clearly wasn’t very convincing, because at that moment he drew his gun. He was fast.

Not fast enough. I rolled to dodge his plasma blast, and from a crouching position, shot his gun out of his hand.

Then I shot him in the jaw. Once, making a gaping roar out of his angry scowl. Then I shot him in the body. Once, twice, thrice, about a hundred times in all. He wasn’t wearing face armour, I could have shot him in the forehead and killed him outright. But that would have defeated the object of the exercise.

Eventually his armour cracked and a bullet went through and exploded. He convulsed. He spat blood from his bloody lips. And he fell to the ground and he died.

I was breathing heavily by now. It’s a long slow business shooting someone to death when they are wearing body armour. But in fairness, he had it coming.

Then I changed the gun to laser setting and I hunched down next to the body.

The next part was grisly. I cut his skull open, and I gouged a path into the frontal lobe of his brain with a knife. And I took out his brain chip and pocketed it.

I had no real grudge against Robbie Ferguson. He’d taken liberties, but he’d never hurt me, not seriously anyway. His only





66 PHILIPPALMER

major sin was that of omission. He had been a Chief of Police who did not care about law or justice.⁴³

But in his brain chip was all the data I needed to kill my real enemy: Daxox.

I fired a delayed-action projectile bullet into Ferguson's head.⁴⁴

Where it would explode in thirty seconds' time. The point of this of course was to blur the cause of death, and hence conceal my theft of the brain chip.

And then I left the room, counting in my head (four, two, one, BOOM).

And the explosion behind me followed my count.

Then I walked back to the shuttle bay. Cassady was waiting for me there.

"You killed someone?" she asked, quietly.

"Yeah."

"Who?"

"It doesn't matter," I said.

"It matters," she said sadly. But I ignored her subtext. And I tried, for many years afterwards, not to recall that sorrowful look in her eyes.

We clambered inside the shuttle.

"Can you fly this thing?"

I asked Dekon how to fly an XL453⁴⁵ planet-to-planet shuttle craft. The instructions were, fuck me, terrifying. I particularly flinched at:

Care should be taken when activating the anti-inertial drive in a vacuum, since an imprecise calibration can lead to terminal g-forces. Please refer to section 433i para 4 subsection xiv.

⁴³ It was of course common practice for police officials on Corporation planets to be professional gangsters. And indeed in the early years of the Corporation, very few planets actually had any kind of a police force. – *Ed.*

⁴⁴ You see? I told you about this earlier. – *Ed.*

⁴⁵ After intensive checking, it emerges that the planet-to-planet shuttle craft used in Giger Penitentiary was indeed the XL453 model, not the more common XL501. – *Ed.*





ARTEMIS 67

I had no time to refer to section whateverthefuck. I decided to chance it.

“Piece of piss,” I said, insouciantly. And I activated the anti-inertial drive, fired up the engines and – again through my link with Dekon – opened up the roof of the bay. And we flew off at speed into the darkness of space. Three years later I was in Cúchulainn. (Say it like this: Kuh-HOO-lin.)

And there the terror really began.

