



Purgis
The Moon Incident

By
Anthony Zuraski

Terrin System, Planet Earth's Moon - Year 2755

The imperial shuttle touched down on the landing pad; two gunships flew in the hanger close by flanking it. The vents hissed out the bottom of the shuttle as the pressure was equalized. The ramp lowered setting down where Magistrate Lorin waited. Rows of soldiers lined the red carpeted path behind the magistrate, all standing at attention.

Down the ramp walked four soldiers of the Praetorian Guard, the personal honor guard of Emperor Detmus Valarin. The Praetorian wore dark purple armor with white trim, with red waist capes. These soldiers were genetically altered to be larger, stronger, faster, and smarter than common soldiers, each one stood around two and a half meters tall.

They stood to the side of the ramp as Emperor Detmus descended, four more Praetorian walking behind him.

"The city of Nullin welcomes you your imperial highness," Magistrate Lorin said bowing low.

"Thank you magistrate," Emperor Detmus said.

The lights in the landing bay flickered several times before returning to normal. The emperor glanced around the landing bay with a raised eyebrow.

Detmus glared at the magistrate. "I trust everything is in order Magistrate Lorin. I would hate to tell the delegates of The Solar Republic that we

have to reschedule because you have a problem with your power grid.”

“Everything is in order my emperor,” the magistrate said. “A small section of the landing bay power grid was damaged in a recent quake, but our teams are already repairing the damage, the rest of the city was unaffected, your imperial highness.”

“Good and do something about the smell; it smells like recycled air,” the emperor said.

“I will say this alien, you made good on your promise,” the creature said as it walked out of the cargo container.

“I am Narga Jadne, not alien. I told you I would deliver you to the Earth’s moon Zertis, now tell them to release my family,” Narga said.

Zertis was a Larran, a race of large reptilian humanoids that were currently at war with the Valarin Empire. Larrans stood two and a half to three meters tall, and their scales came in a variety of colors, Zertis was blue.

“It is too bad your people are such cowards, you would make worthy adversaries,” Zertis said with a grin.

Narga was a Krelark, a race of humanoids that came from the planet Ozule in the Capella system.

They stood over two meters tall with muscular frames, their heads resembled felines of the planet Earth.

“Your people are the cowards,” Narga said with a growl in his voice. “We would never hide behind hostages like you do.”

“It is not my fault your people lack the mind for superior tactics,” Zertis said. “Now, on to business. Lead us to the tunnels under the colosseum. Your family will be released just before we attack, we wouldn’t want you trying to be brave and warn the humans.”

Narga growled as he turned toward the tunnel behind him, over two dozen Larrans falling in line behind as they escorted his mate and three children.

“The main entrance will be open, all other entrances will be sealed and guarded,” the Praetorian Guard in the hovercar with the emperor said. “Four Praetorian will guard the main entrance, the rest of us will be with you in the colosseum the entire time my emperor.”

“Remove your helmet Purgis,” Emperor Detmus said.

Purgis removed his helmet, setting it on the seat next to him. Purgis Radoon was head of the

Praetorian Guard, and at the age of twenty-nine, the youngest among them. He had served the empire in a variety of roles, including his most recent assignment within the Speculatores Core, the imperial elite unit that didn't exist as far as the people knew. The Speculatores Core was not just an elite unit, they all possessed special gifts and were trained to use them. Purgis' gift was telekinesis, the ability to move objects with his mind, but using it was taxing, and if he was not careful, deadly.

"I have no doubt that your security measures will excel my expectations," Emperor Detmus said. "Do remember that we do not want to make the Quiscain ruling body feel like this is a prison, I want minimal visual presence inside of the colosseum. It is vital that the Solar Republic doesn't feel we are pressuring them into joining this war against the Larrans, they must feel it is in their best interest."

"As you command my emperor," Purgis said.

The central area of the colosseum had real grass that was brought from Earth giving the air here a fresh smell. The dome of the colosseum was opened offering a breath-taking view of the Earth in the night sky. The emperor smiled as he examined the preparations. Several tables of food, both human and

Quiscain were prepared and set out. *The scenery and food are in place, the only thing we need now is the delegates,* the emperor thought as he took his seat at the negotiating table. It was a large circular table with six chairs arranged around it, one for each of the five ruling members of the Quiscains and one for the emperor.

Purgis followed the emperor silently as he scanned all the people in the area with his armor's heads up display, or HUD. His armor's artificial computing intelligence, or ACI, cross-referenced the facial features of each person in the imperial database, everyone checked out.

Each Praetorian Guard wore specialized robotic armor complete with onboard weapon systems and AI computing system. The Praetorian were also armed with laser rifles, ballistic pistols with normal and explosive rounds, and their choice of melee weapon. Purgis had a metal staff that would extend from one meter to two.

"Honor One to all Honor Guard, all colosseum personnel check out, report your status." Purgis said into his mic.

"Honor Four here Honor One, perimeter sweep clean," Honor Four said.

"Honor Seven here Honor One, main gate secure and clear," Honor Seven said. "Be advised, guest delegation approaching main entrance."

“Acknowledged Honor Seven,” Purgis said switching from comms to armor speaker. “Excuse me my emperor, the Solar Republic delegation is approaching the main gate.”

“Thank you Purgis,” the emperor said standing up. Detmus straightened his formal robes and the golden laurel on his head. He needed this to go perfectly. It wasn’t common knowledge, but their war with the Larrans was going badly. The invaders were pushing hard through their defenses causing concern within the empire, especially the Imperial Legates, the highest-ranking officers in the empire. New strategies were being formed, and new weapons designed but these things took time. Time was what he was doing here today. If he could convince the Solar Republic to join the war, then the Krelark Federation, it just might buy them enough time for the empire to get their footing and eliminate this enemy. The Quiscain leaders, known as The Five, entered the colosseum.

“Welcome to the colosseum honored guests,” Emperor Detmus said bowing.

“We have been eating scraps for weeks!” the large green Larran said.

“Quit complaining Sub-Commander Lek, be honored you are even part of this assault,” Zertis said

taking a step toward Lek. "Unless... do you wish to challenge me for my rank?"

"No sir," Lek said backing away from the larger Larran.

"Then report," Zertis said. "Have you finished assembling our weapons?"

"As you say commander," Lek said. "The weapons are ready and stored in the nest. We have opened a path to the target's meeting place and await your orders."

"Have the humans detected you?" Zertis asked.

"No sir," Lek said. "We have scrambling units in place along with the explosives, everything is ready."

"Good, gather the others and arm yourself, it is time we began the hunt," Zertis said.

"What about my family?" Narga asked. "You said you would release them."

"You are right alien," Zertis said. "And I honor my word and deals. These fine soldiers will release your family immediately."

Larran soldiers fired rounds of plasma into Narga's family killing them where they stood. Narga screamed as he ran forward but stopped as Zertis drove a large dagger into his chest.

"I release you and your family from the weakness of your life, may you find strength and courage in your next one," Zertis said.

“You have given us much to think about Emperor Detmus,” Mai’or said, one of the ruling five.

“And we will patiently wait your response Matron Mai’or,” Detmus said. “I know matters like this require a calm mind that considers all the facts and multiple perspectives before rendering judgement. But please, I would be a poor host if we did not stop to enjoy the food and drink my people have prepared for you. I hope you will find it to your liking.”

Mai’or smiled. “I was hoping to try the Kildrosunta, it smells delicious.”

The Quiscain leaders moved to the tables of food, their escort close behind. As they picked over the food the emperor moved closer to Purgis.

“What do you think Purgis?” the emperor asked.

“Area still secure, my emperor,” Purgis said.

“That is not what I am asking about, how do you think the conversation went?” Detmus asked.

“The conversation? The delegates appeared to be genuinely concerned about your warnings my emperor,” Purgis said. “I believe they see how powerful this enemy is and worry about what would happen if we were to lose the war.”

Detmus smiled as he looked over to the delegates. “I will make a diplomat of you yet Purgis.”

Purgis' HUD flickered a reading in an upper area of the colosseum, but just for a moment. He pressed his finger to the side of his helmet switching to comms with the rest of the security force.

"Quadrant seven two two seven report, this is Honor one," Purgis said. No response caused Purgis' hair to stand on end.

"Honor Four this is Honor One. Investigate quadrant seven two two seven, quadrant unresponsive," Purgis said.

"Acknowledged Honor One," Honor Four said.

"All quadrants check in," Purgis said gripping his rifle tighter as he moved closer to the emperor.

Explosions rang out in the quadrant Purgis had been watching, the body of a Praetorian Guard flew out of the stands landing hard in the central area, smoke rising from the blackened armor.

"Contact!" a voice shouted over the comm with the sound of laser blasts in the background.

"Condition black," Purgis said moving between the emperor and the explosion. "All forces secure the escape route and form a defensive perimeter."

Another explosion echoed through the colosseum, this one above the main entrance collapsing it. Alarms sounded throughout the colosseum.

"Main gate compromised," a voice said over the comm.

A loud squeal burst through the Valarin comms indicating a jamming device was activated. Purgis activated his armor's speaker.

"Take cover over here!" Purgis shouted.

The Quiscain delegates closed into a tight circle, their escort closing ranks around them as they slowly moved toward the collapsed entrance. Two sections of the wall, one on each side of the central area exploded out leaving large holes in the wall. Larrans poured out of the holes by the dozens, plasma rounds firing out of their rifles.

Purgis escorted the emperor to the main entrance. He grabbed a large boulder, the motors of his armor groaning in protest as he picked it up setting it on the ground for the emperor and Quiscain delegates to take cover behind.

Valarin soldiers fired down at the Larran invaders from the stands, then everything around the soldiers exploded throwing them in all directions. Parts of the colosseum bleachers collapsed in on the fallen troops. Stones flew out of the collapsed rubble as two Praetorian Guard leapt out of the stands down into the Larran ranks. Four more Praetorian landed next to Purgis.

"Seven, take Three and join the fight, we will stay back and protect the emperor and delegates," Purgis said.

"Yes sir," Seven and Three said moving out.

From the stands three Larrans watched the two Praetorian go, leaving only three, but he still didn't have a clear shot at any of the leaders. Zertis crouched back behind the large stone glancing back at the other two, they were his strongest fighters.

"We take out the guard, then the leaders," Zertis said. "Concentrate your fire on the left one first, stay hidden when not firing, do not give them a shot."

Purgis watched the battle before him. The Valarin soldiers along with the Praetorian Guard were holding the Larrans at bay, but they were badly outnumbered. Two rockets from handheld launchers streaked out from the Larran ranks striking an approaching Valarin gunship which crashed somewhere outside the colosseum.

Plasma fire rained down on Honor Eight standing to Purgis' right. "Contact three o'clock!" Purgis shouted snapping his rifle up returning fire. A grenade hit him in the chest, electrical arcs coursed through his armor shorting out many of his systems.

The three Larrans kept firing at Honor Eight, finally shattering his helmet's visor. Purgis stepped between the Larrans and their target, but it was too late. Honor Eight fell over, smoke pouring out of his helmet.

Purgis fired when he finally saw one of his attackers in the stands. He concentrated his fire taking the creature in the head. "Go!" Purgis told Honor Five

as he activated voice commands to his armor. Static and a distorted computer voice sounded in his ears causing Purgis to curse.

Five sprinted toward the stands as Purgis and the Quiscain bodyguards fired suppressing shots. He slung his rifle onto his back, then pulled out his pistol and sword. Five leapt up the three meters to the bottom row of the stands. He fired three explosive rounds at the large stone the Larrans were hiding behind destroying half of it.

Zertis ran out of the cloud of dust toward the Praetorian as his comrade fired a volley of plasma. He fired a round at the Praetorian's visor blinding him for a heartbeat, which was all he needed. He grabbed his opponent's wrists forcing the human back a step. Zertis leapt up, still holding the human's wrists, flipping upside down above the Praetorian as the other Larran drove a metal spear through the human's throat. Laser fire struck Zertis several times as he fell back to the stands, his armor absorbing most of the damage.

Purgis drew his pistol, loading explosive rounds. He fired two shots at the Larran with the spear as it tried to take cover, one of the rounds blowing off one of the creature's legs.

"We need to move," Purgis said knowing they were in trouble. Comms were still down, and the other Praetorian were too far away to hear him.

“We will be too exposed out there if we move,” one of the Quiscain bodyguards said. “There is no other cover.”

Zertis peeked around the left side of the pillar tossing two smoke grenades. He fired two shots at the remaining Praetorian before running around the right circling around toward his target, the pillar exploding behind him as he leapt down into the central area.

Purgis holstered his pistol switching to his staff, extending it to its two-meter length. He couldn't see his target because some type of metallic dust was interfering with his optics. Purgis readied himself knowing the Larran was coming in to strike close, a heartbeat later the laser fire from Purgis' left told him where. He sprinted toward the sounds finding three of the Quiscain bodyguards already down, the last two standing between the Larran and the delegates.

Zertis stood with a spear in one hand, an energy shield strapped to the other. He charged in bashing the left Quiscain with his shield sending the small creature flying back into the rubble. The other he ran his spear through, taking a laser shot to the chest for his efforts. He whipped his spear to the left, sending the dead Quiscain at the approaching Praetorian.

Purgis spun clockwise as he leapt through the air avoiding the Quiscain while he brought his staff around. Zertis intercepted the strike but the force

behind it sent him stumbling back. *This one is stronger, this one is a worthy opponent*, Zertis thought.

“ACI online,” a voice in Purgis’ helmet said.

“Fire signal flare,” Purgis said.

A small compartment on Purgis’ back opened launching a purple flare high into the sky.

“Arm grapple,” Purgis said moving toward his opponent.

“Grapple armed,” the ACI voice said.

Zertis growled as the flare flew into the sky. He knew the other Praetorian would be coming to their comrade’s aid, he needed to end this quickly if he was going to succeed in his mission. He pressed a button on the shield detaching it.

An arrowhead with a grapple line attached shot out sticking into the armor of the Larran. Purgis hit the retract pulling his opponent closer while punching him in the jaw, staggering him back a couple of steps and knocking out two razor-sharp teeth. Zertis pulled an electro-grenade from his belt slamming into Purgis’ chest as he activated it. Electricity arched up and down the Praetorian causing his body to twitch and convulse as his armor systems were shorted out again.

Zertis swung his spear into the side of Purgis’ head, denting the side of his helmet while spiderwebbing his visor. The Praetorian managed to swing his staff intercepting the next two strikes, but

his armor system was compromised and slowing down. He kicked straight out catching his opponent by surprise staggering him back a step.

Purgis typed a command into his ACI, hoping the command would still be recognized by the scrambled AI. He stabbed his staff into the ground as he pulled off his helmet. The armor let out a hiss before opening in the back. Purgis stepped out of the armor, retrieving his staff. Zertis grinned and nodded at the bravery of the human, this was a worthy opponent indeed.

The Larran charged in stabbing straight out with his spear. Purgis pushed the spear to the right with the middle of his staff as he brought the lower end of the staff down against his opponent's left knee with a crunch. Zertis leaned forward biting into the Praetorian's shoulder but couldn't get a good grip. Both opponents backed up a step before coming in again.

Metal on metal rang out at an incredible tempo as the two metal weapons collided over and over. Purgis was forcing Zertis back step by step, and the Larran could hear the shouts of other humans getting closer.

"I will not fail!" Zertis said with a snarl.

Zertis pulled another grenade from his belt, tossing it at the Praetorian's feet but Purgis struck the projectile with the end of his staff setting it off. The grenade exploded engulfing both combatants.

Blurry vision and a ringing in his ears greeted Purgis as he came to. He could feel shrapnel in his legs from the end of the staff shattering. He was lying on something hard, his armor he realized. A short distance away he saw the blurry image of the Larran stalking toward him. Zertis charged at the human leaping into the air determined to drive the spear right through him and his armor.

On instinct Purgis extended his right arm, palm facing the Larran. Zertis stopped in midair, hanging there by some unseen force. Purgis strained holding the large creature with his telekinesis. He pushed the creature sending him flying backwards landing on his back going into a roll ending on his feet, pulling the plasma rifle from his back.

Purgis rolled off the armor to his left, grabbing the pistol strapped to it as he went. Laser shots struck the Larran, the Quiscain delegates took up the arms of their fallen soldiers. Zertis took aim ignoring the laser fire focusing on his true target. Purgis took aim with an unsteady hand, squeezing the trigger as darkness took his vision.

Emperor Detmus watched as the creature took aim at him, just before his head exploded. The Larran staggered back a step, his rifle shot going wide before falling over dead.

More rockets streaked out of the Larran ranks taking out another gunship, but the two fighters fired

on the Larran rocket position taking them out as they flew past. Two more gunships floated over the colosseum wall firing down on the Larran positions. The emperor breathed a sigh of relief.

Soldiers flooded into the colosseum, rounding up the remaining invaders, the four remaining Praetorian Guard stood protecting their emperor.

“It warms my heart to know you are unharmed, while we also mourn your fallen soldiers,” Emperor Detmus said to the Quiscain leaders. “I take full responsibility for what happened here today, while I cannot bring the dead back to life, any compensation you require for these brave soldiers the empire will gladly pay. In the meantime, we will tighten our security to ensure another tragedy like this does not befall your people.”

“Perspective is an important thing, Emperor Detmus. Reading about the fighting in the war, about the deaths and loss is one thing,” Matron Mai’or said. “It is another thing to witness it firsthand, to participate in it, to have your friends dying around you.”

Matron Mai’or looked to the other Quiscain who all nodded to her in turn. “We will support you in

this war against the Larran, on one condition.”
Matron Mai’or said.

“And what condition is that?” Detmus asked.

“Allow some of our people to join your empire, your ranks, your people,” Matron Mai’or said. “With our people intertwined with yours, it will bring our two people closer than ever before. I know we ask a difficult thing, but all things worth doing are.”

Detmus smiled as he bowed to the delegates. “On my honor and my word, it shall be so.”

Purgis and the other Praetorian Guard stood shoulder to shoulder on the stage before the emperor, all their armor fully repaired and cleaned.

“It is with great pleasure I award these men and women the gold torc for their bravery in the face of the recent Larran ambush,” Emperor Detmus said holding up a gold chain. “In addition, for displaying outstanding bravery and skill saving not only myself, but the leaders of the Solar Republic against the Larran attack, I award Imperial Legate Purgis Radoon of the Praetorian Guard the Glass Crown. May you wear it in pride with the knowledge that you have not only served your emperor well, but the whole empire.”

The crowd erupted in cheers as the emperor motioned towards the soldiers on stage. Purgis stood waving to the crowd as they cheered him and the other Praetorian, but his thoughts drifted to another place.

How did the Larrans get on the moon undetected? And how did they know about a secret meeting between the empire and the Solar Republic, he thought.