

Nowhere To Hide, Part 2

by Tim Ellington

Tennaru paused as his assault force gathered at the rendezvous point. His heart raced at the anticipation of the coming battle, even though he felt disappointed that the opposition would offer little challenge. No matter, he had told himself earlier – every battle could not be a trial to prove one’s ultimate worth. Gongen needed his Ikazuchi unit to take this facility, and a victory for Gongen would be enough validation for today.

He evaluated the enemy’s position, noting that the six Juggernauts split into two groups of three, with one heading back to the cargo depot. Was this an effort to prop up the defense of the cargo depot, or a desperate evacuation tactic? Tennaru decided to let the Juggernauts cover the distance between the maintenance compound and the cargo depot. He would cut off their return, separating the Earther ground units and dividing their strength. Whether the Earthers planned to fight or flee, it made no difference to Tennaru. He would divide their firepower, and employ enough close air support to keep each group pinned down while his own ground forces took control of the entire mining facility. The Gongen commander began to issue orders to his troops, sending a company of warriors, accompanied by the great Ikazuchi NoBot, to the right to begin a direct assault on the mining facility. The mine was their primary objective. Another, smaller, group was sent in a shallow loop to the left, coming up on the opposite side of the cargo depot. Tennaru planned to force the Earthers to defend against two attacking forces on opposite sides of the depot. This would thin the resistance as much as possible while at the same time preventing the Earthers from retreating deep into the complex. That retreat would draw his troops into a more dangerous, close quartered battle in unfamiliar territory. The remaining soldiers would drive a wedge between the cargo depot and the mining facility, preventing the Earthers from uniting with a larger, organized resistance. With Bekker’s Trench preventing any chance of a retreat to the rear, Tennaru expected a short, futile firefight before claiming his victory.

“Now he’s sending a couple of squads to the rear of the depot,” Rathe reported to Howler. Rathe regained his composure after realizing Howler wasn’t rattled by the appearance of the Gongen and that he maintained a firm handle on the situation. As much as the CISyn commander despised Howler, he knew the colonel was a savvy field commander, and had earned his reputation through many battles throughout the Solar System.

“Looks like they’re gonna let the three Jugs with Jespers’ group get back to base, Colonel,” Holden added. “They haven’t made a move to cut them off yet.”

“No,” Howler replied, “he wants them over here. Divide and conquer. Thin the enemy’s front line. Classic strategy. Damned clever of him to send his men around to our back door, though. Damned clever. Holden, get some men down into the tunnels so the Gongen troops get the resistance they expect. I want

things to go like the Gongen commander has planned as long as possible. Tell them to wait until the Gongen are inside before engaging. I don't want our guys pulled outside yet. But they have to keep them away from the Blades. I don't want them to know what we've got until that NoBot and his friends get as far away as possible."

Howler turned to Vilmer. "Pull up the schematics on those bubbles. I want a plan for getting those Blades out as fast as possible when we do pull the string."

Captain Jianbua Tan followed the golden NoBot towards the mining facility, keeping his men in close formation as they approached their target. His orders were simple; engage the Earthers and take control of the mine. As soon as the mine perimeter was breached, he was to personally lead a small team to extract as much of the truginium by-product as could be obtained, and return the material to the *Tachikaze* immediately. He did not know why the material was important, nor did he care. His only concern was to carry out his orders and complete his mission successfully. When it was important for him to know why, he would be told.

Jianbua could see that he would have to use the great Ikazuchi to breach the entrance of the mine. The Earther defenders did not emerge to meet the Gongen army headlong in the open, but instead chose to cower behind the pitifully inadequate security stations along the inside of the mine's main airlock. Jianbua positioned his troops for the impending attack, awaiting only the command from Tennaru Hari to begin the assault.

"Is everybody down in the access tunnels?" Huxt asked as he watched the Gongen troops position themselves about 400 meters from the mine's airlock.

"Yeah. Everybody's out except the eight of us." Relk nervously resumed his position near Huxt. He had just made sure all the miners were safely escorted into the underground tunnels that serviced the air ducts between the maintenance compound and the mine. Howler ordered all but a few personnel moved from the mine to the maintenance compound when he saw the NoBot and the large ground force moving towards the mine. The access tunnels were the only way. "I still can't believe he's going to just hand over the mine like this," Relk added.

"The colonel's got a plan, don't you worry," Huxt said confidently. "He's not giving up anything without a fight. Just trying to keep them Gongen fellas confused."

"If you say so. Still, I'd rather be down in the tunnels myself, or have them rest of them up here. I feel kinda naked facing all these Gongen with just eight men."

“Just sit there long enough to get off a few rounds so they figure they are going to have to fight their way in. Then break and run like hell,” Huxt said.

“Don’t worry about that,” Relk answered.

“By the way,” Huxt added, keeping his eyes trained on the imposing golden NoBot, “thanks.”

“For what?”

“For not saying I told you so.”

Tennaru gave the signal for the attack to begin. With a single command, the central formation of troops pushed into the open area between the cargo depot and the maintenance compound. Gongen soldiers covered the distance between Tennaru’s command position and the targeted entrances to his left and right. Close air support began to lay down fire in front of the advancing troops, keeping the Earther defenders pinned down in their defensive positions. To his left, Tennaru’s men began their attempt to enter the rear of the cargo depot; to his right, Ikazuchi and the golden swarm moved in on the mine. Tennaru himself headed for the center of the open ground between the depot and the maintenance compound in order to better direct the two-pronged attack. Victory was only a matter of time, he told himself.

Lieutenant Hisuke Masa was the first to reach the airlock on the far side of the cargo depot. He pulled a small silver box from a pocket on his uniform and attached the unit to the control panel on the outside of the airlock. In moments, the airlock opened and Hisuke entered with a squad of soldiers. In less than a minute the strange silver object opened the inner door to the airlock and the Gongen invaders were inside the depot. A short hallway led to a large access way, which began at ground level and was covered by a transparent alloy that provided a view of the Ganymede horizon. As the passage descended, the clear roof gave way to the barren, rough-hewn rock that had been bored out to form the complex over hundreds of years. Hisuke and his men rushed into the tunnel, pushing down into the heart of the cargo depot, hoping to reach the entrance to the large, domed crater before hitting any resistance. His group was about 80 meters from the huge cargo bay doors when they burst open and a squad of Earther troops opened fire on his men. A chaotic firefight broke out, with the Gongen troop advancing slowly down the tunnel while forcing the Earthers to seek cover just inside the bay doors.

Hisuke tossed a sonic grenade into the open doorway, stunning many of the Earther troops and allowing the Gongen to approach within 20 meters of the opening before the Earthers regrouped and engaged their enemy in hand-to-hand combat. Hisuke could see beyond the bay doors, and saw more Earther troops coming to reinforce the rapidly withdrawing Earthers. Hisuke also saw something more disturbing, getting a glimpse of six more Juggernauts deployed at the front of the cargo bay. He quickly dropped back and called a warning to Tennaru.

“Major Tennaru! We have reached the cargo bay and there are at least six more Juggernauts still inside! Repeat: There are six more Juggernauts inside! We are attempting to take command of the cargo bay!”

Tennaru heard Hisuke's report but did not respond. He was transfixed at the sight of twelve GR-Blades, which had suddenly emerged from Bekker's Trench. Rising like malevolent birds of prey, the hovering, grav-powered Earther support vehicles had stubbed wings that bristled with weapons. Their gunfire targeted his troops in the center of the compound with surprising efficiency, and then the Blades turned towards the mine to engage Ikazuchi and Captain Jianbua's troops. Tennaru had no time to wonder where they came from. He watched in amazement as the Earther ships quickly occupied the Ikazuchi unit and slowed their assault on the mine. How was this possible, he thought? Hisuke's voice snapped him back to the moment at hand.

"Major! We have more Juggernauts in the cargo bay! Do you read me?"

"Yes, Lieutenant," Tennaru replied. "I understand. You must prevent the Juggernauts from leaving the cargo bay! By any means necessary. . . they must not leave!"

"Understood, Major!"

Hisuke returned to the front of the skirmish, yelling to his men to charge into the cargo bay. They pushed through the opened doors and into the cavernous bubble. Hisuke was stunned to see that beyond the six Juggernauts were two more troops of twelve GR-Blades, whose crews were currently manning their vehicles. Before he could signal Tennaru, he was hit by a blast from an Earther F.L.I.C., and his right arm below the elbow disappeared in a cloud of blood and bone and metal. Gone too was his comm unit. Hisuke staggered backwards until he fell back against the rough wall of the cargo bay. He watched his men fight valiantly against suddenly insurmountable odds and realized he had stumbled into a fully armed squadron of Earther soldiers. He knew he could not take his objective. His only goal now was to prevent the Earthers from getting their men and equipment topside to the battle above.

"What the hell are you trying to pull?" Rathe virtually spat the words at Howler, who wasn't fazed at all by the CISyn commander's lack of protocol. "When did you move a troop of Blades and position them in the trench? How are we supposed to run command and control if we don't even know where the damned assets are? What kind of stunt was that, Colonel, keeping us in the dark?"

Howler gave Rathe a stone-cold stare. Ignoring the shocked expressions of the rest of the command crew, Howler walked over until his face was a scant ten centimeters from Rathe.

"Are you upset, Commander, because I'm not following CISyn's script, or are you just pissed off that I didn't let the Gongen crawl in bed with us before I did something about it?"

Rathe was taken aback by the direct insinuation of Howler's statement. He didn't have an immediate response, and the two men simply glared at one another until Vilmer's voice broke the silence.

"Colonel, we have penetration in the bubble. Gongen troops have made it all the way to the cargo bay."

"How did they get there that fast?" Howler asked.

“Not sure, sir. “We’re still trying to get the Blades and the rest of the Jugs ready to roll. We’ve got live fire in the cargo bay.”

Rathe seemed just as surprised to hear about the Gongen’s successful entry as Howler. “Holden, do we have visual on the bubbles?”

“Dammit,” Howler swore under his breath. Knowing he had probably lost his last element of surprise, he turned to Vilmer and shouted his orders. “Get the Jugs and however many Blades we can man in 3 minutes prepared to go, then execute the emergency launch plan.”

When Ikazuchi began the assault on the mine entrance, Huxt, Relk, and the rest of the security detail fired wildly and randomly at the advancing Gongen force to give a show of resistance. The ruse gained them next to nothing, as Ikazuchi’s powerful lighting bolts hit the entrance to the mine, causing a massive explosion that collapsed the front part of the airlock and caused a significant loss of atmosphere in the forward area of the mine building structure. Two of the Earther soldiers were killed on impact, and three more were badly injured. Relk suffered a broken arm, but was otherwise okay. He looked to left and found Huxt lying on his back among the debris.

“Can you move?” Relk asked his partner.

Huxt shook his head and smiled at Relk. “I don’t think so. Damn, that robot packs some juice. Get the men who can walk down the corridor past the first safety seal and hit the emergency alarm. That will seal the accessway and keep the air in.”

“Let’s go then.”

“I’m not going to make it. Move on. Now! If the air pressure in here gets too low, it will seal automatically, and you’ll all be trapped out here. Get those men on the other side of that seal.”

Relk looked at Huxt and knew he was right. “I’ll be right back,” he said, and he turned away to get the rest of the men together.

Huxt lay back and looked up at the crumbling ceiling. *I bet ol’ Howler ain’t going to like this*, he thought to himself. He struggled to breathe in the rapidly thinning air and listened to the sounds of the Gongen army firing into the devastated front of the mining entrance. He could barely hear Relk yelling at the other men, trying to get them to safety. He could hear the Gongen soldiers now, crashing through the remnants of the front of the mine, and could see the blasts of their guns firing in the direction of Relk and the retreating men. He could barely breathe now, his lungs heaving up and down, straining to get what little oxygen was left in the dissipating air. As he started to feel the light-headed effect of asphyxiation, he closed his eyes and smiled. He could hear the familiar guns of Howler’s Blades approaching across the battlefield.

Tennaru ordered the main body of his army to move towards the mine to help the Ikazuchi unit defend against the sudden appearance of the GR-Blades. In addition to the sudden attack by the Blades, the three Juggernauts positioned near the maintenance compound turned and used their heavy guns to pound the Ikazuchi unit from the side. The Gongen major expected the heaviest fighting to be at the mine, but did not expect the brunt of the attack from the flank. He was determined to crush the Earther defense before it could slow down Ikazuchi's objective of taking control of the mine.

Captain Jianbua saw the approach of the Blades and Juggernauts, and positioned his men to face the enemy head on. The Earther heavy tanks nicknamed Juggernauts were spherical vehicles, about 5 meters tall. Rolling like a giant ball, they covered any kind of terrain in rapid fashion. Sponson guns pointed forward from each side of the sphere, with a huge main gun that could fire on the move. They were fast, heavily armored, and amazingly maneuverable.

As soon as the fighting began in earnest with the approaching Earther firepower, Jianbua directed a team to head through the damaged entrance, while his own team of specialists retreated to head towards the truginium collector and pursue their own agenda. He was sure Ikazuchi and the well-trained infantry could handle the unexpected surge from the Earthers. Jianbua was pleasantly surprised to find no resistance at the collector assembly, and quickly set his men to the task of carefully removing the truginium stored in the device.

Lieutenant Hisuke pulled himself to his feet, but continued to lean against the wall as he struggled to formulate a plan to get control of the cargo bay. He could see his troops engaged in a heavy firefight with the Earther soldiers, who were trying to get their Blades and Juggernauts ready to scramble. He instinctively reached for his comm unit to tell Major Tennaru about the additional Earther forces, but recoiled at the sight of the bloody stump of his right arm. He looked for his nearest comrade in order to get a message out, but could not get the attention of any of his men as they fought the Earthers at close quarters. Hisuke watched the battle unfold in front of him, on the brink of shock, but fighting to maintain control in the chaos. His attention was drawn to a group of four Gongen soldiers who pinned down a female Earther soldier near one of the Blades. They alternated covering fire as they moved in on her position. Hisuke allowed himself a smile as he observed the skill and discipline of his soldiers.

His smile quickly disappeared as the Earther soldier bolted from her position and caught the closest Gongen by surprise, a blast from her sidearm catching him in the throat. A tuck and roll brought her up to a ready position and she fired on a second soldier, hitting him in the shoulder and knocking him to the ground. In what seemed to be an extension of the same motion, she dove behind a Juggernaut and disappeared. Hisuke could not believe the raw athleticism and instinct possessed by the Earther. He had never seen such a reversal of position in a battle situation. Hisuke was jarred back into reality as the first of the remaining six Juggernauts began to move towards the access tunnel to join the battle on the surface. He watched in a stunned detachment as one of his men charged the Juggernaut as it began to move, slicing at the mechanical beast with his oversized thunder-edge greatsword, the monomolecular edge

carving deep into the metal casing. But it was not enough to stop the vehicle from entering the tunnel and heading towards the exit. Weak from loss of blood, Hisuke slumped back against the wall, unable to stem the tide of a battle that had turned against him.

“Get ready to drop back,” Thurren yelled at Coreg over the din of the battle and the exiting Juggernauts. “This one’s about to pull out.”

Thurren and Coreg began to back away from the exiting Juggernaut when Coreg spun around and fired into the shadows between two Blades, killing a Gongen soldier who circled around the group and was coming up behind them.

“Damn! How did you see that?” Thurren asked, taken aback by the fact he was almost ambushed in the cargo bay.

“Just get moving!” Coreg yelled at Thurren, who slowed down to look at the dead Gongen. “They’re going to depressurize the bubble and retract part of the roof to get some of the Blades out. Get the hell out of here!”

Coreg and Thurren joined the rest of the Earthers who had not manned their vehicles and rushed through the doors to the access tunnel leading back towards the command center. As they entered the tunnel and the door sealed behind them, Thurren pulled Coreg to the rear of the group and stopped. He looked straight into her eyes and blurted out without really thinking.

“What the hell was that back there?” he asked, careful to keep his voice down. “The two Gongen you took out by the Jug, and the guy in the shadows. I saw that, Coreg. I *saw* it. It’s like you knew what was going to happen. Nobody’s that good.”

“It just happened,” Coreg answered honestly. “I didn’t think about it. I just did it.”

“What, you’re some kind of psychic or something . . . you can see the future now?”

“No,” she said, somewhat confused herself. “I was just trying to get out alive. I didn’t know what was going to happen, it just worked out as it went, you know.”

“No,” Thurren said. “I don’t.”

“Have you ever been listening to a song you haven’t heard in a long time? You could never write down the words, but when you’re singing with the music, the words just come to you right when you need them. They just sort of ‘happen.’ That’s what it was like. I didn’t know what I was going to do . . . I just did what came to me as it was going on. I . . . I can’t explain it other than that.”

“Well, I’m glad . . .” Thurren was cut off by three men crashing through the tunnel door just as the klaxon started sounding to signal the decompression of the cargo bay. They were carrying the unconscious Lieutenant Hisuke up the tunnel.

“Give us a hand, Lieutenant, we need to get this guy to the infirmary. Howler’s orders.”

Thurren looked at Coreg, who simply nodded in return, and fell in with the three soldiers carrying the wounded Gongen to the infirmary. Coreg stood alone in the tunnel for a few moments, letting all that had happened sink in. Confused, yet strangely content, she started slowly walking back towards the command center.

Tennaru was focused on driving the Earther forces towards the Ikazuchi unit, cutting off their exit route and surrounding them. It was an ancient, yet effective battle strategy made famous by Earth's Alexander the Great. His infantry and close air power would be the hammer, the Ikazuchi NoBot and its men the anvil. He would crush the Earther forces between the two Gongen units, and be done with this unexpected resistance. He nearly forgot about the Juggernauts discovered in the cargo depot until one of his men signaled him that six more Juggernauts were coming up behind their formation.

Tennaru pulled back, and ordered a platoon of his force to turn and face the Juggernaut attack, while keeping the majority of his assets moving towards the mine. He turned to rejoin his men when he was hit with another unexpected message.

"Major Tennaru, there are more Blades coming up behind the Juggernauts! At least 10, maybe more! Ground troops as well!"

Tennaru could not believe the wall of Earther men and artillery moving towards the rear of his unit. He knew immediately that his intel had failed him, and that his plan of attack must change to fight a different battle than he had expected. He contacted his lieutenants and turned his men to fight the Earthers closing in from behind.

When the Gongen troops engaged the newly employed Earther forces, the Blades and the Juggernauts fighting the Ikazuchi unit swung around to attack Tennaru's formation from the rear. They forced Tennaru to choose: Pull Ikazuchi away from the mine to help himself, or risk losing the bulk of the Gongen army to the concentrated firepower now being brought by the Earthers. Tennaru had been surprised, but he was not a foolish commander. He immediately contacted Captain Jianbua and gave him new orders.

"Jianbua, do you have the truginium?"

"Almost done, Sir. We have collected and properly stored most of the material."

"I'll leave Ikazuchi and its troops with you," Tennaru instructed, "We'll take a defensive position to allow you to return to the *Tachikaze* with the material. But hurry!"

Tennaru ceased offensive maneuvers against the Earther facility and strategically moved his troops to prevent Howler's two-pronged encirclement of position. He gave up much of the ground he gained on his initial push, but he knew occupation of the facility was no longer an option for this assault. He now knew better what assets the Earthers had here, and he would prepare a new plan when he returned to the *Tachikaze*.

As Coreg walked up the hallway to the command center, she unexpectedly ran into Rathe making his way towards the cargo bay. He stopped when he got to her.

"Nice performance in the bubble, Lieutenant," Rathe smiled as he spoke. "I didn't know you had it in you. Very nice."

"What do you mean?" Coreg asked.

"Don't be modest, we could all see what was going on during the firefight in the cargo bay. Those bays have lots of monitors, and you guys put on quite a show. Even Howler was surprised at how well you handled those Gongen."

Even though Rathe made her feel uncomfortable, she couldn't help be flattered to know that Howler had noticed her during the battle. That could only come in handy later, she thought.

"Thanks, sir."

"Come with me, Lieutenant, I think I could use your help with something."

"Don't I need to get back to the command post?" she asked.

"Not yet. This will only take a few minutes."

Rathe resumed his walk down the hallway, and Coreg joined in behind him.

"Colonel, we're being contacted by the *Pompeii*," Vilmer called out to Howler as the Earther commander stared intently at the battle progressing on the open Ganymede landscape. "They are asking if we need assistance."

"What's their ETA?"

"About one hour, 45 minutes, sir."

Howler thought about the situation for a moment. "Tell them to get here as quick as they can. I don't want that Gongen carrier to pull any more surprises. At least with the *Pompeii* around, it's more of an even fight."

"Will do, Colonel."

"Rathe, how did the *Pompeii* know we were under attack?" Howler asked, but suddenly realized Rathe was no longer in the command center.

"We sent out a distress call as soon as the Gongen carrier began deploying, sir," Holden interjected. "The *Pompeii* was already en route for a supply run and troop rotation, I guess we just got lucky."

"Lucky," Howler said under his breath. "Yeah, lucky."

Howler turned back to the monitors and watched the battle progress. The Ikazuchi unit didn't bite on his gamble, and didn't pursue his men away from the mine. He thought it odd, though, that they seemed content to hold their position, without establishing a defensive base within the mine facility. They seemed to be waiting for something. But what? What was the Gongen commander planning to do next?

Captain Jianhua watched as the last of the triginium was carried away from the collector unit. On instructions from Tennaru, he planted explosive charges and set the timer before leaving to join his men at the rendezvous with Ikazuchi. He understood their mission had not succeeded, but at least his objective had been completed. He wondered what Tennaru would do now that they had the triginium. His question was answered as he heard the retreat command issued through their comm system. The great golden Ikazuchi stood as a giant bulwark as the Gongen assumed a retreat formation and began the egress towards the *Tachikaze*.

The Earther soldiers soon dropped their pursuit, unwilling to be drawn close to the giant Gongen carrier and be trapped away from their own base. The *Tachikaze* issued cover fire to drive the Earthers further back, effectively ending the small pockets of combat still lingering on the battlefield. The Gongen commander, Tsien Shun, wasted no time getting his troops and equipment loaded on the carrier. The *Tachikaze* was outfitted with efficient retrieval equipment to complement its rapid-deploy capabilities. Though Tsien had desperately wanted to make a run over the Earther base and do as much damage as possible, the detection of the approaching *Pompeii* hastened the Gongen departure from that area of Ganymede.

Colonel Howler held the small, silver box in his hand as he looked down at the Gongen soldier lying on the infirmary table.

"This is what they used, huh?"

"Yes, sir," Thurren answered. "Got them inside in a hurry. We were barely able to get in position before they had a free shot at everything we had in the bubble."

"Interesting," Howler said, mostly to himself. "How's this guy? Is he gonna make it?"

"He should. Lost a lot of blood, but looks like he only suffered the arm wound."

"Make sure he's treated well, and let me know when he's able to talk."

Tennaru Hari entered the *Tachikaze's* briefing room, and sat down in the only empty chair. Also seated at the table were Tsien Shun and another Gongen officer he did not know. There were no pleasantries exchanged.

"Did you get the traginium?" the unknown man asked directly.

"Yes, Sir," answered Tennaru. "We got all the available material. It is secure on board."

"Very good."

"The Earthers had ten times the military presence at Bekker's Trench than we were led to believe," Tsien complained. "We failed to gain control of the mine."

"That is unfortunate," the mysterious man replied absently. "But we have the traginium. That will do for now. Please return to Gongen immediately, Captain."

Tsien started to ask another question, but thought better of it. "Yes, at once," he answered.

Tsien and the stranger got up and left the room, leaving Tennaru sitting quietly, wondering what had just transpired.

"Where's Rathe?" Howler asked Vilmer, becoming more and more agitated in the aftermath of the battle. "I've got some questions for him, now."

"I believe he's already on the *Pompeii*," Vilmer answered. "He's in the rotation group."

"I suppose Holden is gone too?"

"Yes, sir."

"Figures. Do we have casualty reports yet?"

"Yes, sir. We lost several men between here and the mine, and we had about a dozen casualties in the cargo bay. But we gave worse than we got, sir."

"Fortunately," Howler said.

"We do have one MIA, sir."

"Who?"

"Coreg, sir. She's unaccounted for. Thurren says she made it out of the cargo bay uninjured, but they split up when he helped move the Gongen prisoner to the infirmary. No one has seen her since."

"Well, keep looking," Howler snapped. "She's gotta be somewhere."

Howler turned off his wristcomp and picked up the silver box that had been taken from the Gongen. He couldn't shake the feeling it was just a small piece of a big puzzle. A big, dangerous puzzle. How did it work? How had it ended up on Ganymede? Too many questions, he thought. He just didn't have any answers. But somebody did. *Somebody* knew something. Rathe, he knew, was hiding something. But what? Howler rubbed his tired eyes, and walked over to his bed. He lay back and stared at the ceiling with myriad problems racing through his mind. The last two days had been quiet in the aftermath of the battle with the Gongen, but there were still so many things that didn't add up. The whole issue of being deployed on Ganymede in the first place. The Gongen attack. The destruction of the truginium collector. The mysterious silver box. The convenient arrival of the *Pompeii*. Coreg. Rathe.

Rathe. That name kept coming up as Howler considered all the questions that plagued him. *You owe me some answers, Jylan Rathe.*

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