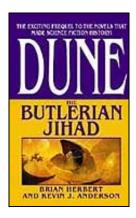**The perfect introduction to the new Dune novel: The Butlerian Jihad.**

You are about to read "Hunting Harkonnens" by Brian Herbert and Kevin J. Anderson. This original SF adventure short story is a unique stand-alone addition to the bestselling DUNE Saga begun by Frank Herbert with the publication of DUNE-one of the great epics of imaginative literature-nearly 40 years ago. "Hunting Harkonnens" takes place just prior to the events of **DUNE: THE BUTLERIAN JIHAD**, the first novel of Brian and Kevin's brand-new trilogy, which will tell the story DUNE fans around the world have longed to hear-the cataclysmic conflict between humans and thinking machines. **DUNE: THE BUTLERIAN JIHAD** will be published by Tor Books this coming September.

"Hunting Harkonnens" is a wild roller coaster of a tale reminiscent of classic short stories like "The Most Dangerous Game" and the great SF stories of Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, and Frank Herbert. It tells the story of the deadly hunt by the cymeks for Piers Harkonnen, the older brother of Xavier Harkonnen, just one of the new characters to be found in **THE BUTLERIAN JIHAD**.

Patrick LoBrutto
Editor

This is a work of fiction. All the characters and
events portrayed in this story are either fictitious
or are used fictitiously.

DUNE
Hunting Harkonnens
A Tale of the Butlerian Jihad

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DUNE
HUNTING HARKONNENS
A Tale of the Butlerian Jihad

Brian Herbert and Kevin J. Anderson

I

T he Harkonnen space yacht left the family-held industries on Hagal and crossed the interstellar gulf toward Salusa Secundus. The streamlined vessel flew silently, in contrast to the fusillade of angry shouts inside the cockpit.

Stern, hardline Ulf Harkonnen piloted the yacht, concentrating on the hazards of space and the constant threat of thinking machines, though he kept lecturing his twenty-one-year-old son, Piers. Ulf's wife Katarina, too gentle a soul to be worthy of the Harkonnen name, asserted that the quarrel had gone on long enough. "Further criticism and shouting will serve no purpose, Ulf."

Vehemently, the elder Harkonnen disagreed.

Piers sat fuming, unrepentant; he was not cut out for the cutthroat practices his noble family expected, no matter how much his father tried to bully them into him. He knew Ulf would browbeat and humiliate him all the way home. The gruff older man refused to consider that his son's ideas for more humane methods might actually be more efficient than the inflexible, domineering ways.

Clutching the ship controls as if in a death grip, Ulf growled at his son, "Thinking machines are efficient. Humans, especially riffraff like our slaves on Hagal, are meant to be used. I doubt you'll ever get that through your skull." He shook his large, squarish head. "Sometimes, Piers, I think I should clean up the gene pool by eliminating you."

"Then why don't you?" Piers snapped, defiant. His father believed in forceful decisions, every question with a black-and-white answer, and that belittling his son would drive him to do better.

"I can't, because your brother Xavier is too young to be the Harkonnen heir, so you're the only choice I have . . . for the time being. I keep hoping you'll understand your responsibility to our family. You're a noble, meant to command, not to show the workers how soft you can be."

Katarina pleaded, "Ulf, you may not agree with the changes Piers made on Hagal, but at least he thought it through and was trying a new process. Given time it might have led to improved productivity."

"And meanwhile the Harkonnen family goes bankrupt?" Ulf held a thick finger toward his son as if it were a weapon. "Piers, those people took terrible advantage of you, and you're lucky I arrived in time to stop the damage. When I provide you with

detailed instructions on how our family holdings are to be run, I do not expect you to come up with a 'better' idea."

"Is your mind so fossilized that you can't accept new ideas?" Piers asked.

"Your instincts are faulty, and you have a very naive view of human nature." Ulf shook his head, growling in disappointment. "He takes after you, Katarina -- that's his main problem." Like his mother, Piers had a narrow face, full lips and a delicate expression . . . quite different from Ulf's shaggy gray hair framing a blunt-featured face. "You would have been a better poet than a Harkonnen."

That was meant to be a grave insult, but Piers secretly agreed. The young man had always enjoyed reading histories of the Old Empire, days of decadence and ennui before the thinking machines had conquered many civilized solar systems. Piers would have fit into those times well as a writer, a storyteller.

"I gave you an opportunity, son, hoping that I could depend on you. But I have had my answer." The elder Harkonnen stood clenching his large, callused fists. "This whole trip has been a waste."

Katarina caressed her husband's broad back, trying to calm him. "Ulf, we're passing near the Caladan system. You talked about stopping there to investigate the possibility of new holdings . . . maybe fishing operations?"

Ulf hunched his shoulders. "All right, we'll divert to Caladan and take a look." He snapped his head up. "But in the meantime, I want this disgrace of a son sealed in the lifepod chamber. It's the closest thing to a brig onboard. He needs to learn his lesson, take his responsibilities seriously, or he will never be a true Harkonnen."

II

As he sulked inside his improvised cell, with its cream-colored walls and silver instrument panels, Piers stared out the small porthole window. He hated arguments with his stubborn father. The rigid old ways of the Harkonnen family were not always best. Instead of imposing tough conditions and harsh punishments, why not try treating workers with respect?

Workers. He remembered how his father had reacted to the word. "Next you'll want to call them employees. They are slaves!" Ulf had thundered as they stood in the overseer's office back on Hagal. "They have no rights."

"But they deserve rights," Piers responded. "They're human beings, not machines."

Ulf had barely contained his violence. "Perhaps I should beat you the way my father beat me, pounding contrition and responsibility into you. This isn't a game. You're leaving now, boy. Get on the ship."

Like a scolded child, Piers had done as he was commanded. . . .

He wished he could stand toe to toe with his father, just once. Every time he tried, though, Ulf made him feel that he had let the family down, as if he were a shirker who would waste their hard-won fortunes.

His father had entrusted him to manage the family holdings on Hagal, grooming him as the next head of the Harkonnen businesses. This assignment had been an important step for Piers, with complete authority over the sheet diamond operations. A chance, a test. The implicit understanding was that he would operate the mines as they had always been run.

Harkonnens held the mining rights to all sheet diamonds on sparsely populated Hagal. The largest mine filled an entire canyon. Piers recalled how sunlight played off the glassy cliffs, dancing on the prismatic surfaces. He had never seen anything so beautiful.

The cliff faces were diamond sheets with blue-green quartz marking the perimeters, like irregular picture frames. Human-operated mining machines crawled along the cliffs like fat, silver insects: no artificial intelligence, and therefore considered safe. History had shown that even the most innocuous types of AI could ultimately turn against humans. Entire star systems were now under the control of diabolically smart machines, and in those dark sectors of the universe, human slaves followed the commands of mechanized masters.

At optimal spots on the shimmering cliffs, the mining machines would lock onto the surface with suction devices and separated the diamond material with sound waves at natural points of fissure; holding diamond sheets in their grasp, the dumb machines would make their way back down the cliff to loading areas.

It was an efficient process, but sometimes the sonic cutting procedure shattered the diamond sheets. Once Piers gave the slaves a stake in the profits, though, such mishaps occurred much less frequently, as if they took greater care after they received a vested interest.

Overseeing the Hagal operation, Piers had come up with the idea of letting the captive gangs work without typical Harkonnen regulations and close oversight. While some slaves accepted the incentive program, a number of problems did surface. With reduced supervision, some slaves ran away; others were disorganized or lazy, just waiting for someone to tell them what to do. Initially, productivity dropped, but he was sure the output would eventually meet and even exceed previous levels.

Before that could happen, though, his father had made an unannounced visit to Hagal. And Ulf Harkonnen wasn't interested in creative ideas or humanitarian improvements if profits were down. . . .

His parents had been forced to leave their younger son Xavier on Salusa with a pleasant old-school couple. "I shudder to think how the boy will turn out if they raise him. Emil and Lucille Tantor don't know how to be strict."

Eavesdropping, Piers knew why his manipulative father had left his little brother with the Tantors. Since the aging couple was childless, wily Ulf was working his way into their good graces. He hoped the Tantors might eventually leave their estate to their dear "godson" Xavier.

Piers hated the way his father used people, whether they were slaves, other nobles, or members of his own family. It was disgusting. But now, trapped inside the cramped lifepod chamber, he could do nothing about it.

III

P rogramming made the thinking machines relentless and determined, but only the cruelty of a human mind could generate enough ruthless hatred to feed a war of extermination for a thousand years.

Though they were kept in reluctant thrall by the pervasive computer mind Omnius, the cymeks -- hybrid machines with human minds -- often bided their time by hunting between the stars. They could capture feral humans, bring them back to slavery on the Synchronized Worlds, or just kill them for sport. . . .

The leader of the cymeks, a general who had taken the imposing name of Agamemnon, had once led a group of tyrants to conquer the decaying Old Empire. As implacable soldiers in the cause, the tyrants had reprogrammed the subservient robots and computers to give them a thirst for conquest. When his mortal human body grew old and weak, Agamemnon had undergone a surgical process that removed his brain and implanted it within a preservation canister that he could install into varying mechanical bodies.

Agamemnon and his fellow tyrants had intended to rule for centuries . . . but then the artificially aggressive computers stepped into power when they saw the chance, exploiting the tyrants' lack of diligence. The Omnius network then ruled the remnants of the Old Empire, subjugating the cymek tyrants along with the rest of already-downtrodden humanity.

For centuries, Agamemnon and his fellow conquerors had been forced to serve the computer evermind, with no chance of regaining their own rule. Their greatest source of amusement was in tracking down stray humans who had managed to maintain their independence from machine domination. Still, the cymek general found it a most unsatisfactory venting of his frustrations.

His brain canister had been installed inside a fast scout vessel that patrolled areas known to be inhabited by League humans. Six cymeks accompanied the general as their ships skirted the edge of a small solar system. They found little of interest, only one human-compatible world composed of mostly water.

Then Agamemnon's long-range sensors spotted another vessel. A human vessel. He increased resolution and pointed out the target to his companions. Triangulating with their combined detection abilities, Agamemnon discerned that the lone ship was a small space yacht, its sophisticated configuration and style implying that its passengers were important members of the League, rich merchants . . . perhaps even smug nobles, the most gratifying victims of all.

"Just what we've been waiting for," said Agamemnon.

The cymek ships adjusted course and accelerated. Connected through thoughtrodes, Agamemnon's brain flew his ship-body as if it were a large bird of prey, zeroing in on his helpless target. He also had a terrestrial walker stored aboard, a warrior form that could be used for planetary combat.

The first cymek shots took the League vessel completely by surprise. The doomed human pilot barely had time to take evasive maneuvers. Kinetic projectiles scraped the hull, pounding one of the engines, but the ship's defensive armor protected it against severe damage. Cymek ships swept past, strafing again with explosive projectiles, and the human yacht reeled, intact but disoriented.

"Careful, boys," Agamemnon said. "We don't want to destroy the prize."

Out on the outskirts of League space, far from the Synchronized Worlds, the feral humans obviously hadn't expected to encounter enemy predators, and the captain of this vessel had been particularly inattentive. Defeating him would be almost embarrassing. His cymek hunters would hope for a better challenge, a more entertaining pursuit. . .

The human pilot got his damaged engine back online and increased speed down into the isolated system, fleeing toward the water world. In his wake, the human launched a flurry of intensely bright explosive shells that caused little physical damage, but sent pulses of confusing static through the machine sensors of the cymek ships. Agamemnon's cymek followers transmitted a series of imaginative curses. Surprisingly, the human victim responded in a gruff, defiant voice with equal venom and vigor.

Agamemnon chuckled to himself and sent a thought-command. This would be more fun. His attack ship burst forward like a wild and energetic horse, part of his imaginary body. "Give chase!" The cymeks, enjoying the game, swooped after the hapless human vessel.

The doomed pilot flew standard maneuvers to evade the pursuers. Agamemnon held back, trying to determine if the human was truly so inexperienced or just lulling the cymeks into an unwarranted sense of ease.

They plummeted toward the peaceful blue world -- Caladan, according to the onboard database. The world reminded him of the blue irises his human eyes once had . . . It had been so many centuries, the cymek general could recall few details of his original physical appearance.

Agamemnon could have transmitted an ultimatum to the pilot, but humans and cymeks knew the stakes in their long simmering war. The space yacht opened fire, a few pathetically weak blasts designed for shoving troublesome meteoroids out of the way rather than defending against overt military action. If this was a noble ship, it should have had much more serious offensive and defensive weapons. The cymeks laughed and closed in, perceiving no threat.

As soon as they approached, though, the desperate human pilot launched another flurry of explosives, apparently the same as the gnat-bite bombs he had launched previously, but Agamemnon detected slight fluctuations. "Caution, I suspect --"

Four proximity mines, each a space charge ten times as powerful as the first artillery, detonated with huge shockwaves. Two of the cymek hunters suffered external damage; one was completely destroyed.

Agamemnon lost his patience. "Back off! Engage ship defenses!"

But the yacht pilot fired no more explosives. With one of the surviving cymeks moving only sluggishly, the human could easily have taken him out. Since he did not, the human prey must have no further weapons available. Or was it another trick?

"Don't underestimate the vermin."

Agamemnon had hoped to take the feral humans captive, delivering them to Omnius for experiments or analysis, since "wild" specimens were considered different from those raised for generations in captivity. But, angry at the pointless loss of one of his over-eager companions, the general decided it was just too much trouble.

"Vaporize that ship," he transmitted to his five remaining followers. Without waiting for the other cymeks to join him, Agamemnon opened fire.

IV

Inside the lifepod, Piers could only watch in horror and wait to die.

The enemy cymeks pounded them again. In the cockpit, his father shouted curses, and his mother did her best at the weapons station. Their eyes betrayed no fear, only showed strong determination. Harkonnens did not die easily.

Ulf had insisted on installing the best armor and defensive systems available, always suspicious, always ready to fight against any threat. But this lone yacht could not withstand the concerted attack from seven fully armed and aggressive cymek marauders. Sealed inside the dim compartment, Piers could do nothing to help. He watched the attacking machines through a porthole, sure they could not hold out long. Even his father, who refused to bow to defeat, looked as if he had no tricks remaining to him.

Sensing the imminent kill, the cymeks streaked closer. Piers heard repeated thumps reverberating in the vessel. Through the hatch porthole, Piers saw his mother and father gesturing desperately at one another.

Another cymek blast finally breached the protective plates and damaged the yacht's engines as the vessel careened toward the not-close-enough planet with broad blue seas and white lacings of clouds. Sparks flew on the bridge, and the wounded ship began to tumble.

Ulf Harkonnen shouted something at his wife, then lurched toward the lifepod, trying to keep his balance. Katarina called after him. Piers couldn't figure out what they were arguing about; the ship was doomed.

Cymek weapons fire rocked the vessel with a dull concussion, sending Ulf skidding across the deck. Even the augmented hull armor could not withstand much more. The elder Harkonnen struggled to his feet at the lifepod hatch, and Piers suddenly realized that he wanted to unlock the chamber and get both of them inside with their son.

Piers read his mother's lips as she shouted, "No time!"

The lifepod's instrument panel flashed and began running through test cycles. Piers hammered on the hatch, but they had sealed him inside. He couldn't get out to help them.

While Ulf tried frantically to work the hatch controls, Katarina raced for the panel on the wall and slapped the activation switch. While Ulf turned to his wife in astonishment and dismay, Katarina mouthed a desperate farewell to her son.

With a lurch, the lifepod shot into space, away from the doomed space yacht.

Acceleration threw Piers to the deck, but he scrambled to his knees, to the observation port. Behind him, as the lifepod tumbled recklessly through space, the cymek marauders opened fire again and again, six angry thinking machines combining their destructive power.

The Harkonnen ship erupted in a sequence of explosions into a dazzling fireball, which dissipated into the cluttered vacuum . . . snuffed out along with the lives of his parents.

Like a cannonball, the lifepod tore into the atmosphere of Caladan, spraying red sparks of reentry as it zoomed toward the blue oceans on the sunlit sight of the planet.

Piers struggled with the crude emergency controls in an effort to maneuver, but the small ship didn't respond, as if it were a machine rebelling against its human master. At this rate of speed, he couldn't possibly survive.

The young Harkonnen heir took an agonized breath and tapped pressure pads to alter the thruster pattern. He had little experience in piloting, though his father had insisted that he learn; previously, the skill had not been a priority for Piers, but now he had to figure out the systems without delay.

Looking back, he saw he was being pursued by one of the cymek fighter ships. The spray of reentry sparks increased, like iron filings from a grinding stone. The pursuer's exploding projectiles rocked the atmosphere around him without making direct hits.

Piers sped low over an isolated landmass toward a snowy mountain ridge, with the vicious cymek on his tail, still shooting. Sparkling glaciers girdled the jagged peaks. One of the enemy's kinetic projectiles hit a high ridge, shattering ice and rock. Piers closed his eyes and boldly -- without a choice -- flew through the debris, heard it pummeling the lifepod. And he barely survived.

Just after he scraped over the ridge, he heard a tremendous explosion and saw the sky behind him light up in a flash of bright orange. The mechanical pursuer had gone out of control. Destroyed, just like his parents and their spacecraft. . . .

But Piers knew there were other enemies, and probably not far away.

V

Agamemnon and his cymeks clustered around the space yacht's wreckage in unstable orbit, while mapping the trajectory of the single ejected lifepod. They marked where it crossed the atmosphere, how fast it descended, and where it would probably land. The general was in no hurry -- after all, where could the lone survivor go on this primitive world?

Without orders, though, the one cymek damaged by proximity mines shot after the lifepod, hungry for revenge. "General Agamemnon, I intend to make this kill on my own." Angrily, the cymek leader paused, then agreed. "Go, you get the first shot. But the rest of us won't wait for long." The cymek leader held the rest of them back until he could finish his analysis.

Agamemnon played the distress signal the noble pilot had transmitted shortly before his destruction. The words were encoded, but not with a very sophisticated cipher; the cymek's onboard AI systems translated it easily. "This is Lord Ulf Harkonnen, en route from our holdings at Hagal. We are under attack by thinking machines. There is not much chance we will survive."

Such amazing powers of prediction. Agamemnon assumed the survivor aboard the lifepod must also be a member of the noble family, if not the lord himself.

A thousand years ago, when Agamemnon and his nineteen co-conspirators had overthrown the Old Empire, a group of outlying planets had banded together to form the League of Nobles. They had defended themselves against the tyrants, maintaining their defense against Omnius and his thinking machines. Computers did not hold grudges or gain vengeance . . . but the cymeks had human minds and human emotions.

If the survivor in the lifepod down on Caladan was a member of the defiant League of Nobles, the cymek general wanted to participate personally in his interrogation, torture, and ultimate execution.

Within minutes, however, he received a last-second transmission just before the cymek pursuer crashed on the surface.

"A foolish mission. Next time I want it done right," Agamemnon said. "Go, find him before he can hide in the wilderness. I give the hunt to the four of you -- and a challenge. A reward to the cymek who finds and kills the prey first."

The other cymek ships streaked away from the debris field, heading like hot bullets into the cloudy skies. The human escapee, unarmed in his barely maneuverable lifepod, certainly would not last long.

VI

Abruptly the lifepod shuddered, and a warning siren sounded. Digital and crystal instruments sparked on the panel. Piers tried to interpret them, adjusting the clumsy controls of the careening vessel, then looked up through the porthole to see brown-and-white slopes ahead, bleak frozen hillsides with patches of snow, dark forests. In the last instant, he pulled up, just enough --

The lifepod scraped tall, dark-needled trees and crashed into high tundra covered by only a thin blanket of snow. The impact bounced the pod back into the air, spinning it around for a second plunge into the patchy forest.

In his energy harness, Piers rolled and shouted, trying to survive but expecting the worst. Cushioning bubblefoam squirted all around him just before the first impact, padding his body from the worst injuries. Then the pod crashed again, ripping up snow and frozen dirt. The pod finally came to rest, groaning and hissing.

The bubblefoam dissolved as Piers picked himself up and wiped the fizzing slime from his clothes and hands and hair. He was too shaken to feel pain and couldn't take the time to evaluate his injuries.

He knew his parents were dead, their ship destroyed. He hoped his blurred vision was from blood in his eyes, not tears. He was a Harkonnen, after all. His father would have struck him across the cheek for showing cowardly emotion. Ulf had managed to damage the enemy in a fruitless attack, but there were still more cymeks up there. No doubt they would come hunting for him.

Piers fought down panic, turned it into a hard, instant assessment of his situation. If he had any hope of surviving, circumstances forced him to respond with decisiveness, even ruthlessness -- the Harkonnen way. And he wouldn't have much time.

The lifepod contained a few survival supplies, but he couldn't stay here. The cymeks would zero in on the vessel and come to finish the job. Once he ran, he would have no chance to return.

Piers grabbed a medical kit and all the ration packs he could carry, stuffing them into a flexible sack. He popped the lifepod's hatch and crawled out, smelling the smoke and hearing the crackle of a few gasping fires ignited by the heat of impact. He took a deep breath of cold, biting air then, closing the hatch behind him, he staggered away from the smoking pod, crunching through slushy snow into the meager shelter of dark conifers. He wanted to get as far away as possible before pausing to consider his next step.

In a situation like this, his father would have been concerned about the family holdings, the Hagal mines. With Piers and his parents gone, who would run the business and keep the Harkonnen family strong? Right now, though, the young man was more worried for his own survival. He had never fit in with family business philosophies anyway.

Hearing a high-pitched roar, he gazed into the sky and saw four flaming white trails coming toward him like targeted munitions. Cymek landers. Hunters. The machines with human minds would track him down in the desolate wilderness.

As the danger suddenly came closer to home, Piers saw he was leaving deep tracks in the snow. Blood dripped from a nasty cut on his left wrist; more scarlet splashed from another injury on his forehead. He might as well be leaving a roadmap for the enemy to follow.

His father had said it in a stern, impatient voice, but the lesson was valuable nevertheless: Be aware of all facets of a situation. Just because something is quiet does not mean it isn't dangerous. Do not trust your safety at any moment.

Under the trees, listening to the roar as cymeks converged over his pod's crash-down coordinates, Piers slathered wound sealant on his injuries to stop the bleeding. A moment's hurry can cause far more damage than a moment's delay to plan ahead.

He abruptly changed direction, selecting a clear area where trees had sheltered the ground from the snow and rocks. He moved over the rocky surface in a deliberately chaotic course, hoping to throw off pursuit. He had no weapons, no knowledge of the terrain . . . and no intention of giving up.

Piers climbed higher up the sloping ground, and the snow grew thicker where the trees became sparse. When he reached a clearing, he caught his breath and looked back to see that cymek landers had converged at his lifepod. Still not far enough away, but still without any place to run.

Watching in horrified fascination, Piers saw mobile, resilient walker-forms emerge from the landed ships: adaptable mechanical bodies to carry cymek brain canisters across a variety of environments. Like angry crabs, the cymeks crawled over the sealed wreckage, using cutter claws and white-hot flamers to tear open the hull. When they found no one inside, they literally ripped the lifepod apart.

The walker-forms stalked around the pod, their optic threads gleaming with a variety of sensors. They scanned his footprints in the snow, moved to where their prey had paused to apply his medical pack. The cymek scanners could easily pick up his footprints in the dirt, thermal traces from his body heat, any number of clues. Unerringly, they set out across the bare ground toward where he had chosen to flee.

Chiding himself for the momentary panic that had made him leave such an obvious trail, Piers broke into a full run uphill, always looking for a place to hide, a weapon to use. He tried to ignore his hammering heart and his difficulty breathing in this cold, rugged environment of Caladan. He crashed into another thicket of the dark pines, always climbing.   The slope became steeper, but because of the dense conifers, he couldn't see exactly where he was going or how close he might be to the top of a ridge.

He saw sticks, rocks, but nothing that would be an effective weapon against the mechanical monsters, no way to defend himself against the horrific machines. But Piers was, after all, a Harkonnen, and he would not give up. He would hurt them if he could. At the very least, he would offer them a fine chase.

Far to his rear, Piers heard crashing sounds, cracking trees, and imagined the cymeks clearing a path for their armored bodies. Judging from the smoke, they must be setting the forest on fire as well. Good -- that way they would ruin the subtleties of his trail.

He kept running as the ground became rockier, with patches of ice spreading out on steep slopes. Precariously balanced snow clung to the mountain, ready to break loose at any moment. The trees at this elevation were bent and twisted, and he smelled a foul sulfurous taint in the air. At his feet he saw tiny bubbling puddles, suffused with yellow.

He furrowed his brows, pondering what this could mean. A thermal area. He had reach about such places in his studies, esoteric geological anomalies that his father had forced him to learn before sending him to the mining operations on Hagal. This would be a region of volcanic activity with hot springs, geysers, fumaroles . . . a dangerous place, but one that offered opportunities against large opponents.

Piers ran toward the strong smell and the thickening mist, hoping this would give him an advantage. Cymeks did not use eyes like humans did, and their sensors were delicate, sensitive to different parts of the spectrum. In some cases, it gave the machine pursuers an incredible advantage. Here, though, with the wild plumes of heat and the rocky, sterile ground, the cymeks could not use their scanners to pick up residual traces from his footprints.

He raced through the misty, humid no-man's-land of rocks, snow patches, crusty bare earth, trying to throw off pursuit and seeking a place to hide, or defend. After hours of headlong flight, he collapsed on a warm boulder encrusted with orange lichen next to a hissing steam vent.   More than anything else, he wanted to curl up under a rocky

overhang next to one of the hot springs, remaining hidden long enough to sleep for a few hours.

But cymeks did not require sleep. All of their life-support needs were taken care of with restorative electrafluid that kept them alive in their preservation canisters. They would keep pursuing him without pause.

Piers cracked open the food rations and gobbled two high-energy wafers, but he forced himself to set off again before he felt any resurgence of stamina. He had to press his advantage, not lose any ground.

Using his hands and feet now, Piers climbed steeper rocks. His fingers became powdery with yellow sulfur. He chose the steepest terrain, hoping it would prove difficult for the cymek walker bodies, but it also slowed him down.

The wind began to pick up, and Piers felt it against his face, alternate blasts of warm and cold. The mists cleared in patches, and suddenly the landscape was revealed around him. He looked back toward the last remnants of conifer forests, jutting rocks, and the bubbling mineral pools far beneath him.

Then he saw one of the cymek walker-forms, alone, stalking him. The other three must have separated, circling in their hunt, as if it were some sort of game. The mechanical body glistened silver in the sudden wash of afternoon light. Searching.

Piers knew he was exposed and unprotected on the rocky slope; he slammed his body tight against the rocks, hoping to remain unseen. But within seconds, the cymek had targeted its prey. The mechanical walker unleashed a fiery projectile, a splattering globule of flaming gel that missed Piers and struck the rock, clinging fire.

He scrambled up the rock, finding a new surge of energy. Scuttling rapidly, the cymek negotiated the rough slope, no longer wasting time on the tedious job of tracking the human.

Piers was trapped, with precipitous dropoffs and hot sulfurous pools on the left and right and a steep, smooth snowfield crusted with yellow contaminants above him. Once he got to the top of the ridge, perhaps he could throw rocks, somehow dislodge the cymek below him. He saw no other option.

Clawing with his hands and struggling for footholds, Piers worked his way up the slick glacier field. His shoes punched through the crust, sinking into cold snow up to his knees. His fingers soon grew numb and red. The frigid air seared his lungs, but he scrambled faster, farther. His domineering father would have sneered at him for worrying about mere physical discomfort in a time of such urgency. The glacier seemed to go on forever, though he could see the top, a sheer razor edge on the crest.

The machine hunters must have split up, and perhaps he had eluded the other three among the thermal plumes and crumbling rocks. Unable to find his tracks, they would be combing the ground . . . relentless, as machines always were. Only one of the cymeks had found him, apparently by accident.

Even so, a single monstrous enemy was more than enough to kill him, and this one would be in radio contact with the others. Already they must be coming this way. But this one seemed eager to kill Piers all by itself.

Below, the cymek reached the base of the ice field, scanned for a moment, and then scuttled up. Its long legs stabbed into the snow, climbing faster than any human could hope to run.

The cymek paused, rocked back, then launched another gelfire projectile. Piers burrowed into the snow, and the hot explosive ripped a crater barely an arm's length away from him. The violent impact caused the steep and precarious snowfield to tremble and shift. Around him, the crust began to break apart like a peeling scab. Taking a chance, he kicked hard at one of the hard slabs of packed snow, hoping to send it tumbling down to strike his enemy, but the frozen surface jammed tight again, squeaking and groaning, then falling silent. With a deep breath, he climbed upward again.

As the cymek closed the gap, Piers noticed a rocky outcropping that protruded from the snow. He would scramble up there and make his stand. Maybe he could throw boulders at the machine, though he had no illusions about how effective that would be.

Only a fool leaves himself without options, Ulf Harkonnen would have said.

Piers grumbled at the memory. "At least I survived longer than you did, Father."

Then, to his astonishment, at the crest of the glacier he saw a group of figures that looked . . . human! He counted dozens of people who stood at the top of the snowfield. They shouted incomprehensible curses at the cymek.

The silhouetted strangers lifted large cylinders -- weapons of some sort? -- and began to beat on them. Loud booming sounds echoed across the mountains like thunderclaps, explosions. Drums.

The strangers pounded on their noisemakers. They had no apparent rhythm at first, but then the pulses combined into a resonance, an echoing boom that set the whole snowfield trembling.

Cracks widened atop the ice, and the glacier began to shift. The massive cymek walker struggled for purchase as the frozen ground began to slide.

Seeing what was about to happen, Piers dove for the rock outcropping, sheltering himself in a pocket walled off by thick stone on each side. He held on just as the snow broke free with a hissing, tumbling roar.

The avalanche struck the cymek like a white tidal wave, bowling over the walker-form, knocking and battering it against other rocks. As the enemy machine crashed down the slope, Piers closed his eyes and waited for the rumbling roar to reach its crescendo and then taper off.

When he finally emerged, amazed to be alive, the air itself sparkled with ice crystals thrown into the sky. While the snowpack undoubtedly remained unstable, the strange people charged pell-mell down the broken snow and ice, yelling excitedly like hunters who had just bagged an impressive quarry.

Still unable to believe what he was seeing, Piers stood atop the boulders. And then he spotted the twitching and battered cymek far down the slope, toppled onto its back. The avalanche had struck it with a destructive force equivalent to a heavy weapon. The cymek had been bashed, dented, and twisted, but still its mechanical limbs attempted to haul the walker-form upright.

Although the primitive humans wore drab survival garb made of scavenged materials, they carried sophisticated tools, more than just spears or clubs. Four young natives hurried to the edge of the broken icefield and the trees -- scouts? -- and they kept watch, wary of other cymeks.

The remaining humans fell like hyenas upon the crippled cymek, wielding cutters and grappling wrenches. Was the mechanical hunter calling for help from its three comrades? The natives quickly bashed the transmitter antennas on the walker body then, with startling efficiency they dismantled the walker's struggling legs. The cymek weapon arm flickered in an attempt to launch another flaming projectile, but the Caladan primitives quickly disconnected the components.

From the cymek's speaker patch came a volley of angry threats and curses, but the humans paid no attention, showing no fear. They worked diligently to disconnect the hydraulics, fiber cables, neurelectronics, setting each piece aside like valuable scrap material. They left the cymek's brain canister exposed, the traitorous human mind disembodied once again, though this time not by its own volition.

Numb, Piers looked at the oddly harmless-looking canister that held the cymek's mind. The natives did not destroy it immediately, but seemed to have other plans. They held it up like a trophy.

Full of questions, Piers made his way down the shifting surface of broken snow. The natives looked up at him as he approached, showing curiosity without threat. They spoke a gibberish language that he could not comprehend.

"Who are you?" Piers asked in standard Galach, hoping that someone here would understand him.

One of the men, a gaunt old fellow with a short reddish beard and lighter skin than his companions, gestured toward Piers in happy victory. He stood in front of Piers, pounded himself on the chest. "Tiddoc."

"Piers Harkonnen." He responded, then decided to simplify, "Piers."

"Good, Piers. Thank you," he said in recognizeable Galach, but with a thick accent. Seeing the young man's surprise, Tiddoc spoke slowly, as if fishing the right words out of his memory. "Our tongue has Galach roots from the Zensunni Wanderers, who fled the League long ago. For years I worked in cities of the noblemen, performing menial tasks. I picked up words here and there."

Paralyzed and immobile, the captured enemy cymek continued to snarl insults through an integrated speakerpatch as the Caladan natives used two of the amputated walker legs as support rods, lashing the brain canister so that it dangled between the poles like some captured wild beast. Two of the strongest-looking natives put the metal rods over their shoulders and began to march back up the slope. The other natives gathered up the components they could carry and climbed the rough mountainside.

"Come with us," Tiddoc said.

Piers had no option but to follow them.

VII

As Piers followed the rugged men uphill, one of his knees throbbed with each step, and his back stiffened until it burned. He had not yet had time to accept the deaths of his parents. He missed his mother, for her kind attentions, her intelligence. Katarina had saved his life, launching the lifepod before the cymeks could destroy the space yacht.

In a way, Piers even missed his father. Despite Ulf's gruffness, he had only wanted the best for his sons, harshly focused on his responsibilities for Harkonnen holdings. Advancing the family fortunes was always paramount. Now it seemed that his little brother Xavier was all that remained of the Harkonnen bloodline. Piers had little hope that he would ever get away from Caladan . . . but at least he had survived this long.

He limped up the steep slope, trying to keep pace with the agile natives. Inside its preservation canister, the evil cymek brain sloshed as the primitives carried it. Staticky shouts came from the canister's speakerpatch, first in standard Galach, then in other languages. Tiddoc and the natives seemed to find it amusing.

The natives paid little attention to the disembodied brain, except to glare at it and bare their teeth. The red-bearded old man was the most demonstrative. In addition to menacing facial expressions, he made threatening gestures with a cutting tool, swinging it close to the canister's sensors, which only served to agitate the captive brain more. Obviously they had encountered cymeks before and knew how to fight them.

But he was concerned about the other three mechanical hunters. They would not give up the pursuit -- and once they found the avalanche site and the dismantled walker-form, the cymeks could track the natives here. Unless the captured one had not been able to signal for help before the avalanche had swept it away. Cymeks did not like to admit weakness.

Piers looked around for any fortifications the people had made. Ahead, overhanging ice formed, a giant roof that sheltered a settlement. The primitives had made their camp in a large area melted out by thermal vents in the ground. Women and children bustled among rock huts, performing chores, pausing to look at the approaching party. The people wore thick clothing, boots, and hats lined with fur from unknown local animals. Piers heard the yelping of animals, saw furry white creatures near the dwellings.

Beyond the shelter of the overhang, steam roiled up through thick layers of ice and snow, accompanied by heat bubbles from mudpots and geysers. As Piers followed the tribe down narrow rock steps toward the settlement, he marveled at the stunning contrast of fire and ice, even as he cast constant worried glances over his shoulder to make sure he saw no sign of the other cymek hunters. Occasional droplets rained down from the frozen ceiling of the dome, slowly melting, but when Piers looked up at the blue ice overhead, he decided the glacier -- and the settlement -- had been here for a long time. . . .

When abrupt darkness fell like a curtain drawn in front of the sun, the native Caladan women used jagged pieces of wood to build a large fire on a rocky area at the center of the settlement. Scouts went out on patrol to keep watch for enemy machines while the rest of the tribe settled down to celebrate. The men brought hunks of fresh meat from other hunts and speared them on long metal spits over the fire.

They placed the captive cymek's brain canister off to one side, in the ice, and ignored it.

Speaking to one another in their guttural tongue, the natives sat on furs around the fire and passed the food around, sharing with their visitor. Piers found the meat too gamey for his liking, but he finished a large hunk, not wanting to insult his hosts. He was famished, and supplemented his meal with part of a ration bar he had salvaged from the lifepod; he offered the rest of the packaged food to his rescuers, and they eagerly accepted.

Still, the ugency gnawed at him. Even among so many other people, he did not feel safe, and he tried to convince the old leader that the danger had not gone away. "There are more cymeks, Tiddoc. I think they're hunting me."

"We already killed one," he said.

"But what about the others? They are still out there --"

"We will kill them, too. If they bother with you. Cymeks have little patience. Lose interest quickly. Are you so important to them? My people know that we are not." He patted Piers's wrist. "We have scouts. We have defenses."

Following the meal, Tiddoc and his people sat around the story fire, telling ancient parables and adventures in their native tongue. During the sharing, the tribesmen passed around gourds of a potent beverage. Wrapped in a fur to ward off the chill air, Piers drank, and felt warm in his belly. At intervals, the old man translated for Piers, relating tales of the downtrodden Zensunni who had fled the machine takeovers, as well as slavery in the League of Nobles.

A little tipsy, Piers defended the League and their continuing fight against the thinking machines, though he sympathized with the unpleasant plight of the Buddislamic slaves on Poritrin, Zanbar, and other League Worlds. While Tiddoc struggled to translate, Piers told of epic battles against the evil Omnius and his aggressive robots and cymeks.

And, with a thick voice, he told how his own ship had been destroyed, his parents killed. . . .

Tiddoc gestured to the cymek brain canister. "Come. The feasting is done. Now we finish our machine war. The people have been looking forward to this." He shouted something in his own language, and two men lifted the canister by its improvised poles. The cymek grumbled from its speakerpatch, but it had run out of effective curses.

Several women lit torches from the central fire and led the way up a path from the dripping glacier overhang. Full of good cheer, the natives marched away, carrying the impotent enemy brain. The cymek hurled threats in every language it could think of, but the primitives only laughed at it.

"What are you doing?" the cymek demanded. Controlling his last functional thoughtrodes, the disembodied brain twisted in its container. "Stop! We will crush you all!"

Piers followed them over a ridge and down a slope to where the air reeked of sulfur and the porous rock grew warm underfoot. Carrying the helpless cymek, the group paused at a steaming hole in the rock and stood chattering and laughing. They held the brain canister over the ominous opening.

Piers bent closer to the hole, curious, but Tiddoc yanked him away. The red-bearded elder wore an eerie smile in the torchlight.

A rumble sounded deep below, and with a preliminary spurt of hot spray, a geyser erupted, a scalding jet that parboiled the cymek's brain. The enemy's curses turned to shrieks, followed by babbling sounds and disjointed pain that trickled out of the damaged speakerpatch.

When the geyser subsided, the delirious cymek cried and gibbered. Moments later the geyser erupted again, and the speakerpatch unleashed hideous howls that sent shudders down Piers' spine.

Even though this monster had tried to kill him, had taken part in the murder of his parents, Piers could not tolerate hearing its misery any more. When the boiling jet subsided again, he took a rock and smashed the speaker, disconnecting it. But the natives continued to hold the agonized brain over the geyser hole, and when the scalding spray gushed out a third time, the cymek screamed in silence, until it was boiled alive in its electrafluid.

The natives then cracked the canister open on a rock and devoured the hot, cooked contents.

VIII

The rock hut was warm and marginally comfortable, but Piers slept poorly, unable to put the horrific images out of his mind. When he finally dreamed, he saw himself strapped to poles while the natives held him over the geyser hole. He heard boiling water rushing toward him, and he awoke with a scream caught in his throat.

Outside, he heard only the howl of an animal, then silence.

Then mechanical sounds.

He stumbled to the entrance of the hut and peered outside into the cold, sulfur-smelling air. Now the furry guard animals howled. The primitives shouted and stirred in their encampment. The scouts had been watching.

In a slit of grayish, misty sky between the ground and the icy overhang Piers saw four aircraft approaching with insect-machine noises, their engines glowing in the predawn sky. Cymeks!

Tiddoc and the natives fled their stone huts, grabbing torches, weapons. Piers ran out, anxious to help. He had lost the other two cymek hunters in his flight the previous

day, but the sophisticated thinking machines would have combed the landscape with their scanners until they finally picked up his trail . . . which had led the monsters here.

The cymek ships landed in the nearby rock field and opened hatches, each one disgorging an armed walker body. The crablike warrior machines marched downslope with alarming speed. Ahead, the primitives scattered, hooting, waving torches, taunting the enemy.

One of the cymeks launched a rocket of gelfire, which exploded and collapsed part of the arched, glacier ceiling. Shards of ice tumbled down, smashing the evacuated stone huts.

Tiddoc and the villagers scampered out of the way as if it were a game, gesturing for Piers to follow as they hurried along the path they had taken the night before, onto the geyser field. In daylight Piers saw that it was a broad, gently sloped area of boiling mudpots and hot springs. Fumaroles and geysers belched repeatedly, filling the air with foul steam and heat plumes. Shouting, cursing, the people split up, following instinctive routes across the crusty ground. The natives' supposed panic was a strangely organized action, like a cat and mouse game. Were they luring the enemy? They seemed to have a plan, a hunt of their own.

Piers ran along with them, ducking as the four cymek walkers shot projectiles into the hissing thermal area. Their mechanical bodies plodded forward like heavy spiders on the uncertain ground. For sophisticated machines, their aim was terrible. The cymeks' optic threads and thermal sensors must be nearly blinded in the chaos of heat signatures.

Tiddoc hurled a spear, which clanked on the head turret of the largest cymek walker. It was an ineffective weapon, designed to distract and provoke the cymek, rather than damage the walker-body. The leader ran ahead, hooting, luring the cymek onward.

Agitated, the largest machine-creature bellowed through a speakerpatch, "You cannot escape Agamemnon!" The other three cymeks scrambled along behind it.

Piers shuddered. All free humans knew the famous general of Omnius's army, one of the brutal original tyrants.

With a lucky shot, one of the enemy machines blasted a young man who danced too close to the weapon arm, and his twitching, burning body writhed on the ground. The Caladan natives, looking angry and vengeful, tightened their ranks and worked harder against the cymeks. They tossed home-made explosives that exploded with smoke and fire and a loud concussion, leaving scorch marks on the cymek bodies. The machines with human minds did not slow in their progress.

Light-footed, the primitives raced across the volcanically active area. The cymeks, oblivious to the trap, charged after their prey, smashing salty encrustations, pursuing the natives into the reeking mists. They shot more blobs of gelfire, fired explosive projectiles. Another daring man died, his chest blasted into a smoking crater.

Tiddoc and the natives kept hooting and shouting, defiant. Two of the smaller cymeks surged forward into a crater-pocked geyser field. The waving, taunting primitives stopped and turned, expectant.

The thin shell of hardened ground cracked, split. The two mechanical walker forms tried to skitter backward, but the surface gave way beneath them, breaking apart.

Both cymeks plunged through the dangerous ground and tumbled screaming into roiling sulfur cauldrons.

Piers joined Tiddoc and the other humans in their loud cheer, which was squelched with a third native, a long-haired young woman, was cut down by hot projectiles.

Unexpectedly, a furious geyser blast rocketed out of the ground next to a third cymek attacker, scalding the brain canister. Its thoughtrodes damaged, the mechanical behemoth veered away and stumbled around in confusion. The cymek fell to its articulated knees, the electrafluid in its stained brain canister glowing blue as it focused its mental energy.

Tiddoc tossed a small, home-made explosive onto the ground, like a crude grenade. The detonation caused no further damage to the armored walker, but the ground crust fractured. While the wounded mechanical enemy reeled, disoriented, the surface gave way. The third cymek joined the others in the molten mud.

Agamemnon kept advancing toward the retreating humans, as if scorning his incompetent underlings. The lead cymek stalked unwavering toward old Tiddoc. The red-bearded man and his companions threw their spears and more crude explosives, but the mechanical general did not flinch. Behind them and on the sides lay superheated soil, while the immense cymek blocked their only avenue of escape.

On impulse, Piers ran in front of the lead cymek, shouting to distract it. He snatched up a discarded spear and thumped it against one of the tall walker legs. "Agamemnon! You murdered my parents!"

To his surprise, the cymek general swiveled its head turret, and thermal sensors locked onto the upstart human's form. "A feisty one!" the monster said with considerable amusement. "You are the vermin we have been chasing."

"I am a Harkonnen nobleman!" Piers shouted. He swung the spear like a cudgel at the brain canister. He struck the thick armor plaz with a blow hard enough to rattle his bones -- but he left only a tiny nick on the protective canister.

The cymek bellowed a laugh. One of Agamemnon's clawed legs grabbed Piers, yanked away the spear. The young man felt the sharp claw tighten around his torso. He was dimly aware of Tiddoc howling --

Then suddenly the crust gave way beneath the heavy cymek walker. Frothing mud gushed upward, and Agamemnon tumbled into a boiling geyser pit, still clutching his human victim. The claw loosened, just barely, and Piers scrambled on top of the body, trying to shield himself from the heat, to grab the rough rock of the pit's edge. Superheated steam blasted upward, eradicating all signs of Piers and the last machine invader.

IX

A live and angry, Agamemnon reinstalled himself in an intact spaceship lander and departed from the watery world. With his heavily protected walker body, he had

clamped onto the edges of the fuming pit, endured the steam blasts without falling into the molten mud.

The verminous people rallied, hurled more explosives at him, and Agamemnon despised himself for being forced to retreat. With his hydroaulics already damaged -- and his foolish neo-cymeks all wiped out -- his walker-form limped and scuttled back to the landed spacecraft, leaving the tribe behind. Systems onboard his ship reconfigured his brain canister to the controls; he discarded the ruined walker body, leaving it as scrap on the cursed surface of Caladan.

The only survivor of his cymek squad, Agamemnon left the unremarkable world behind. He would return to Earth, and the computer evermind Omnius, and make his report.

At this point, he was at liberty to create whatever explanation he chose. Omnius would never suspect him of lying: Such things simply did not occur to the all-pervasive computer. But the cymek general had a human brain. . . .

As Agamemnon flew out into open space, he would have enough time to think of appropriate explanations and shift the blame. He would include a version of the events in his ever-growing memoirs recorded in the machine database.

Fortunately, the all-powerful and all-seeing evermind simply wanted information and an accurate recounting of all events. Making excuses was a purely human weakness.

X

On the League capital world of Salusa Secundus, a young boy looked up at dark-skinned Emil Tantor, a wealthy and influential noblemen. They stood on the front lawn of the sprawling Tantor estate, with the tallest buildings of the city visible in the distance. It was early evening, with lights twinkling on in the palatial homes that dotted the hills.

Ulf Harkonnen's distress signal had finally been intercepted, and Emil Tantor had brought the boy the terrible news about his parents and brother. More casualties in the long-standing war against the thinking machines.

Young Xavier Harkonnen bowed his head, but refused to cry. The kindly nobleman touched his shoulder and spoke deep-throated, gentle words. "Will you have me, and Lucille, as your foster parents? I think it is what your father wanted, when he left you in our care."

Xavier looked into his brown eyes, nodded.

"You'll grow into a fine young man," Tantor said, "one to make your brother and parents proud. We will do our best to raise you right, to teach you honor and responsibility. You will make the Harkonnen name shine in the annals of history."

Xavier gazed beyond his foster father up to the faint stars glimmering through the dusk. He could identify some of those stars, and knew which systems were controlled by Omnius, which were League Worlds.

"I will also learn how to fight the thinking machines," he said. Emil Tantor squeezed his shoulder. "I will defeat them one day."

It is my purpose in life.

XI

O n a dark night in the bright snowfield and dark pines, the Caladan primitives sat on furs around a roaring fire. Keeping their oral tradition alive, they repeated the ancient legends and stories of recent battles. The elder Tiddoc sat beside the foreigner accepted among them, a hero with bright eyes and waxy, horribly scarred skin. A man who had fought single-handedly against a cymek monster and fallen into a scalding hot opening . . . but had crawled out alive, clinging to the battered cymek walker-form.

Piers gestured with one hand; the other -- burned and twisted into uselessness -- hung limp against his chest. He spoke passionately in the ancient Buddislamic tongue, halting as he struggled for words and then continuing when Tiddoc helped him.

Caladan was his home now, and he would live the rest of his life with these people, in obscurity. No escape seemed possible from such a remote place, except through the stories he told. Piers kept his audience enthralled as he spoke of great battles against the thinking machines, while he also learned the Songs of the Long Trek, chronicles of the many generations of Zensunni Wanderings.

As his father had realized, Piers Harkonnen had always wanted to be a storyteller.

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Herbert & Anderson
Hunting Harkonnens