

The Liberty Belt

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by

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Chapter 26 (phase two)

“Having hopefully cleaned up this planet, we must now concentrate on Havel. I would like to isolate its inhabitants if possible,” Alfred suggested to his teams at their riverside meeting place.

“How will you manage that,” asked Martin.

“I can only suggest an approach. Nobody in my community is sufficiently experienced to implement it. Thrupple needs you and your mediators to execute the operation. Would that be acceptable to you?”

“We are happy to do so, but it would not be possible without your technology and your pilots. How do you envisage that to work?”

Alfred then continued to explain his proposal along with the integration of his own community, the Earthlings and the mediators.

“Given that we are all willing to help, I need to make it very clear that we do not put our physicists at risk as the future security of our planet is dependent upon them. Also, this is a Thrupple dispute, I would not want our Earthling guests put at risk. Do you have a problem with this,” Alfred asked Martin.

“None at all. May I ask who will lead the operation?”

“I had assumed that would be you, if you have no objections; however, I believe you should include Mileva in your procedural work.”

“That sounds fine to me. I shall talk to her as soon as we have completed this meeting,” confirmed Martin.

“Do you have any suggestions concerning the sequence of events,” he asked Alfred.

“I think that perhaps we should first eliminate their fuel stores and vehicles, along with any potential associated manufacturing facilities, as Havel is the nearest threat to Thrupple and therefore poses our greatest threat. I would also like to remove its outside

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contact facilities. How do you propose to minimise casualties?”

Martin considered the problem for little more than a minute, and then suggested;

“in my opinion, the lives of our own, being the victims, should take precedence over those of the aggressors. Therefore, I would suggest that whilst we only target the people and infrastructures that represent a potential threat, we minimise surface deployment. My team of six will be despatched to the planet’s surface during darkness, in two teams of three to each of the vehicle bases we know about. 360° cameras will be fitted to the top of our skull-caps. Each team will be supported by a stealthy IDV hovering a few kilometres above, and each mediator will be supported by one of your security team members in the supporting IDV. We keep in touch verbally and visually. Your security team members will see what we see, but they will concentrate on our rear. They will know which direction we will be looking as it will be identified on their 360° holographic image. They will also have weapon systems with them if needed or can pull any of us out in less than a minute. We belt up and away from trouble where the nearest IDV collects us. We simply press the emergency icon on our bracelet. I assume that our exact positions will always be known. Any comments,” asked Martin looking around at his colleagues.

“Sounds fine to us,” they all agreed.

“Bert, could you please see to the cameras for me? As quick as you can,” and turning to Martin; “may I also ask that you develop and hone your communication procedures with our security support members.” Then turning to Turk; “could you please utilise Michael, and anybody else you need, to replace all non-Thrupple satellites around Havel with our own that will

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intercept all direct signals. I will then need you to identify any Havel vehicle manufacturing bases. The better our preparation, the greater our chance of success with no casualties.

“If it is possible to destroy any facility from above, then that is what we shall do; in preference to descending to the planet’s surface,” declared Martin.

“Should we disable the time-machine on Havel’s moon before we attack the planet,” asked Bert. “They may be using it for real-time surveillance.”

“That is an excellent idea,” agreed Alfred.

“What do we use to destroy vehicles and manufacturing facilities,” asked Martin.

“Initially, you don't. You simply identify their location and any vulnerable points. After you have secured the necessary information, you evacuate or move on to the next location, by belt. We will provide suitable weapons only after you return with your surveillance information. I suggest that you move around at night having set your coveralls to black, and belt up to your support IDV to sit out daylight periods.

Now that we have eliminated the Thrubble contingent, I believe we should deal with Havel as quickly as possible. May I ask that you all start right away. I suggest we all meet up here in two weeks to discuss progress.”

Charles and Turk called Alfred to one side and showed him an idea they had for the coming event. Alfred cringed, but acquiesced;

“I suppose you are quite right.”

“It will take three weeks to manufacture on squire, so we need to get a move on,” suggested Turk. “Can I assume that manufacture can begin immediately?”

“Is it already designed,” asked Alfred, astonished.

“Charles and I have worked on this over the last few weeks,” he confirmed. “We assumed something like it

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might be necessary. One of them can be carried by each of our IDVs. I was not proposing to fit them to Michael's."

"Then you must go ahead," Alfred reluctantly agreed.

Alfred messaged Rolf to ask if he had identified the destination of the vehicles sent to Havel. Rolf confirmed that he had already recovered all the computers of the expelled Thrupps to his facility. *'I will let you know as soon as I have completed my investigations,'* he messaged back. The team met up two weeks later as suggested by Alfred, having initiated manufacture and installation of the skull-cap cameras, which would be complete in another week. Given the sensitivity of Thrupp hearing, Martin's and Alfred's teams decided to rely on a form of Morse code to communicate simple messages by tapping or scraping on their helmets. After which, they spent their time studying the survey images of Havel's surface.

"Apparently, all vehicles were delivered here and here," said Alfred pointing to two locations on a holographic image of Havel's surface. "I don't believe that we have witnessed any vehicle movement from our survey satellites, and the last vehicle delivered to the planet was prior to our satellite deployment. I suspect, therefore, that all vehicles are likely to be in these locations. Moreover, it is also likely that their fuel supply is close by."

Two weeks later still, everything was ready. Turk and Michael had identified only one unfriendly satellite orbiting Havel and replaced it with one of their own. They had also detected an extraneous direct signal transmission originating from one of the vehicle bases. Turk intercepted this signal by launching a blocking satellite that was no more than a messenger, the surface of which was covered with an uneven coat of very soft rubber. The velocity and

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position of the blocking messenger was guided by the signal's movement. Turk also showed the mediators a setting on their bracelet that would obfuscate any cameras that may follow their progress on the ground;

“you should keep this setting active at all times unless you are using it as a weapon.”

As far as anybody knew, no signals were leaving Havel. Immediately after this was confirmed to Alfred, he declared it time to act.

Bert and Turk left for Squire in their IDVs to collect their luggage. Turk's IDV included the mediators, and Alfred's security team were in Bert's. They agreed to meet the others above the time-machine on Havel's moon in two weeks.

Both of Michael's IDVs took off for Havel's moon ten days later. One was manned by Michael, Rosalind and Charles, and the other by Julia, John and William. Shia and Mileva remained behind on Thrubble watching the action with Alfred. Michael's and Julia's IDVs were intended for backup, if required.

All four IDVs arrived at the rendezvous at the same time and, after destroying the time-machine, they immediately left for their respective target locations.

On arrival twelve kilometres above his target co-ordinates, Turk's visual image of the surface below was not particularly informative, largely because his location was in darkness. He selected a radar view, from which he could display a contour map of the terrain to see if it told him anymore, but it too revealed very little of use. He knew that it would be necessary to identify the exact location and orientation of the base before descending to a suitable deployment altitude.

He therefore decided to call upon the services of Michael's IDV as it was not encumbered by luggage, asking him to descend closer to the planet's surface. Turk sent Michael

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the co-ordinates and asked if he could look for the base entrance.

Michael decided to do this alone as he had no wish to risk more of his team than he believed necessary. Given that his IDV was covered in soft black rubber, he knew it would be almost undetectable from the surface at night unless somebody was looking for it, so he descended to two kilometres directly above the co-ordinates he was given, and circled around it at ever-decreasing radii. All during this time, he had a permanent infra-red holographic display of the planet's surface below, to identify humanoid presence thereabouts. There appeared to be some animal life, but nothing remotely humanoid that he could see. Eventually he began to focus on a weak light, the shape of which looked like an opening at one end of a relatively narrow mound, that must be more than two kilometres long.

He manoeuvred to the front of, and half a kilometre above, an apparent low and wide opening, and quickly concluded that this was indeed a large entrance to an artificial construction with what looked like a natural roof.

Michael sent the exact co-ordinates together with radar display of the construction shape from above that Turk could use to fix its exact position and orientation.

Turk subsequently dispatched the radar map to Bert's IDV in the hope that his target would be similar. He also asked Michael to keep an eye on the target during the ensuing incursion, which would begin in less than three minutes. Michael positioned himself at an altitude of one kilometre directly above the centre of the mound, and returned his computer to an infra-red display.

Turk descended to an altitude of one kilometre to release Martin's team. After opening the escape hatch the mediators belted down to the ground. Immediately the hatch was closed, the IDV returned to an altitude of twenty-five kilometres. It would take them thirty-seconds

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to reach the ground from this height. Julia's IDV was ten kilometres higher, and Michael's IDV hovered above the base.

Martin and his team of two stood stock-still in the tall grass for thirty seconds looking around. Except for their eyes, they were totally black and needed no camouflage in this darkness. Eventually, when they were satisfied that they had not been spotted, they walked carefully towards the vehicle base. Their support personnel, up in the IDV kept a close eye on their rears tapping out the all-clear message every few seconds.

It was an amazing sight. This was an artificial building with a natural roof. 'No wonder it is invisible from above', Martin thought to himself. The building had an open front and there were lights on within, but the illumination was way back inside as were the vehicles. Light was almost invisible outside its entrance.

Martin indicated for the other two to remain at the entrance whilst he ventured inside. He adjusted the colour and intensity of his coverall as he approached the active area and looked around for surveillance cameras. Whilst he couldn't see any, he assumed they must exist. He therefore remained hidden from the main area as much as possible. He was reluctant to rely entirely on EME interference to impede surveillance camera identification. There were definitely Thrupps working around here. He reached the first vehicle after about five minutes.

Alongside it to his left, he noticed a collection of barrels that were large enough to contain a standing Thrupp. He carefully walked around videoing it and stored the information on his computer. As he wandered around the vehicle, hiding from any Thrupps that were within view, he noticed a sign that displayed the message 'Fuel Supply', below which was a large rigid pipe that was terminated

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with a valve adjacent to the vehicle. He decided to follow this pipe and locate its source.

Whilst Martin was investigating inside the structure, Michael spotted two humanoids appear from the rear of the structure and wander towards Martin's two colleagues standing guard at its other end. He immediately sent an urgent message to Turk's IDV warning him of the potential threat to his team.

Michael realised, however, that his warning was unnecessary. After sending his message, he returned to his display and watched as Martin's team of two, were already moving slowly back along the structure. Whilst this was happening, the direction and speed of the humanoids remained constant. Michael realised that the Thrupp's incredible hearing had been warning enough, and in their black coveralls, Martin's team would be all but invisible.

Michael, Rosalind and Charles were now watching intensely the events on their display. As they watched the humanoids walk past Martin's team within a metre or so without changing step, it was obvious that they were indeed invisible. Immediately they had passed Martin's team, the image became a little blurred for about ten seconds. After which, they could see on the display two images were apparently lying and writhing on the ground, whilst the other two, presumably Martin's team, walked slowly back to the building's entrance. The two humanoids had apparently been tied up and were lying on the ground attempting to wriggle out of their bindings.

Meanwhile, inside the structure, Martin found what he was looking for; the fuel stores. There were two massive cylindrical walls about three hundred metres ahead of him protruding into either side of the building. The fuel pipes appeared from this distance to be running directly into their footings.

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Martin decided he had seen enough for his first survey, so he turned around and headed back to the entrance, where he found his colleagues waiting for him. They touched the extraction icon and waited for thirty seconds, after which they belted for the pre-arranged altitude and touched it again. Turk's IDV appeared alongside less than two seconds later. Once inside, Martin described what he saw to the occupants of all four IDVs.

"The building must be more than two kilometres long. There are at least eight vehicles in this building, probably more. It is enormous. About a third of the way along its length, the building is straddled by two massive fuel stores. I suggest you investigate the length of this building to see if there are any roof markers on the fuel stores."

"There are," said Turk, looking at a detailed data image of the site, "now we know where to look, I can see an aerial over each store; look. They're quite small but very visible. Bert, can you see if your facility is the same?"

Bert had already identified his own target from the data provided earlier by Turk. So he knew where to look for both its entrance and its fuel tanks, which were now obvious.

A voice came over Turk's comms a few seconds later;

"it appears that both facilities are identical.

What do we do about this?

We have the luggage to take these out now."

Turk sent a message to Alfred, asking for permission to finish the job immediately. A few minutes later, a message to the affirmative was received, but only on the understanding that complete destruction of both sites could be assured.

"Ok," said Turk, "can you hear us in the support IDVs?"

"Yes," replied Michael and Julia.

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“This is what I recommend; Bert and I will position ourselves directly in front of each building at an altitude of one kilometre. Michael and Julia, you will both position yourselves at the same altitude, above and outboard of one of the fuel stores. You aim maximum energy and intensity EME beams at the rooves of both fuel stores and hold them until both stores ignite. Immediately afterwards, Bert and I will let go our luggage and when it has achieved an altitude of fifty metres, we aim it straight inside the entrance of the building. Any Questions?”

“We will all confirm when we are in position, it should take no more than thirty seconds,” replied Bert.

About half a minute later, confirmation from all four IDVs was received by all.

“Ok, Michael and Julia let me know when you're aimed and ready to fire,” requested Turk.

Twenty seconds later, Turk received confirmation;

“I suspect that the fuel store rooves will be quite thin, so ignition may be immediate. Bert you should be ready to deploy as soon as I give the signal to fire.”

He was correct, the high-intensity EME penetrated the rooves and ignited the fuel in less than five seconds, so he and Bert immediately released their luggage.

A highly explosive, reinforced fabric rocket fell from each IDV, their horizontal attitude being maintained by inflatable, helium-filled parachutes. It took eight seconds to achieve their launch altitude at which time the rockets automatically ignited, ejected their parachutes, and headed for the respective building entrance, guided by Bert and Turk via their nose cameras. Five seconds later, both buildings, including their contents were obliterated. All four attacking IDVs accelerated away from their positions to avoid damage from flying debris. They then positioned themselves five kilometres above the raging fires, videoing the awe-inspiring scenes of devastation.

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“It’s going to be a few hours before we can ensure that all the internal vehicles have been destroyed,” declared Michael.

However, the entire roof of both buildings had been blown apart and it was possible to view the internals through the fire. Two of the vehicles at the back of Turk’s target buildings appeared to be largely intact, so he released high intensity EME at the fuel tanks of both vehicles, hoping they were fully charged; they were. The resultant explosions added to the destruction. All the vehicles in Bert’s building appeared to be damaged, but to make sure, he also aimed EME at the least damaged vehicles in his vision. All three targets exploded. Whilst the fires raged below, additional explosions were witnessed as other undamaged vehicle fuel tanks ignited.

“Surely nothing can possibly fly out of these buildings now,” speculated Bert.

“There’s no way fuel alone will have created that mess,” said Charles. “There was ammunition in there. That lot were planning an invasion. Why then haven’t we observed a launch from 'B'? It’ll take them twenty years to reach this solar system.”

“Perhaps Havel were going to do this one unilaterally,” suggested Rosalind.

“In that case, we probably need to deal with 'B' in a hurry,” added Charles. “I suspect they’ll have been warned when we disabled their time machine; EME takes less than six hours to get there.”

“But we also know that it will take them twenty years to reach here,” said Rosalind.

“How long should we wait here videoing,” Bert asked Turk. “We do have survey satellites orbiting this planet.”

Martin messaged Alfred for permission to leave the site and return to Thrubble.

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Less than three days later, the four machines were parked at Alfred's cavern and the various teams were sat around on the river bank discussing their next move.