

KRILLAZ

**MORRIS
KENYON**



KRILLAZ.

© Morris Kenyon. March 2014.



WARNING! This book contains scenes of horror and moderate violence. It is not intended for the easily offended or young children. You have been warned, so if you read on, don't blame me.

* The names, characters, places and events in this book are products of the writer's imagination or have been used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any similarities to real persons, living or dead, actual events, locales or organisations are purely coincidental and not intended by the author.

* Licence Notes: Thank you for downloading this free e-book. Although this is a free book, it remains the copyrighted property of the author, and may not be scanned, reproduced, copied or distributed for commercial or non-commercial purposes whatsoever without written permission from the author except in the case of brief quotation embodied in critical articles and reviews. If you enjoyed this book, please encourage your friends to download their own copy where they can also discover other works by this author. Thank you for your support.

Cover image by Maratam from: www.fiverr.com

This story is dedicated to my fellow writer, Dai Alanye, whose Roger Fee series initially inspired this, and whose friendship has kept me going and writing.

PLOT SUMMARY:

You'd need a good reason to visit Hancox 1 – a tide-locked world infested by biological terror weapons – Krillaz – a nightmare genetically modified cross between rats and hi-mans. Even hunters avoid the place. However, interplanetary recovery agent Vic Vargo has one million reasons to go. In line to collect a million Hydrans if he rescues a playboy from the talons of the Krillaz, he teams up with a group of executives on a management bonding exercise and heads out to an abandoned city.

There, Vargo realises they have all bitten off far more than they can chew. Unlike the Krillaz...

Also, includes the bonus short story: 'Sideways Through Time'.

CHAPTER 1: ONE MILLION REASONS.

You have to be plum loco to want to spend any time on Hancox 1. I'm not crazy – I scored over 86% on my aptitude evaluation back at University, which is a good score. You don't want 100% as nobody's that sane. If anybody ever achieved that score they'd probably lock them up in the stasis-jails as well as the low scorers, just to be on the safe side.

So what's so bad about Hancox 1, I hear you ask? What's right about it, I'd reply? Well, it's a tide-locked planet, the first in a system of three orbiting a dim, M-type red dwarf star on the far side of the Pegasus Sector. Tide-locked, you ask next? C'mon, where have you been? Weren't you concentrating in astrophysics? A tide-locked world is where one side of the planet constantly faces its sun while the other is exposed to the dark and cold of space.

On any planet with an atmosphere, this imbalance creates gale force winds and usually the daylight side is desiccated desert while the night-side is a frozen wilderness. However, on those worlds lucky enough to have deep oceans and thick cloud cover, which minimises these extreme effects, life can get a toe-hold, although it's nearly always simple stuff.

So, as you've gathered, despite abundant water, Hancox 1 is no paradise world. Most aren't. Being less than desirable, the Bureau allocated it to mostly Central Asian refugees from the Third Sino-Turkmen War. If you don't recall it, look it up in the History files – about two hundred years ago, I think. No, I can't remember what that war was about – when you get down to it, the reasons are usually fear, status and mineral rights, I'd guess. Ultimately, that's what most wars are about. Anyway, these refugees fled to Hancox 1's scattered sub-continentals and built themselves a new life. May not have been a great life, at least at first, but it was better than their ruined homelands.

But these refugees weren't a unified people – there was a sub-group fleeing the Nova Beruvian stonequakes, for example – and each sub-continent soon ended up supporting one or more countries. Sooner or later, rabble-rousing demagogues arose backing petty tyrants and warlords. Eventually, of course, these statelets fell out among themselves and started warring.

And then one side used Krillaz. And that's why I wouldn't choose to go to Hancox 1. What do you mean; you've never heard of Krillaz? What do they teach at

school these days? Or have they suppressed data on those monstrosities? Can't trust anything you read these days.

Okay, okay. I'll tell you. You'll need to know if you're setting foot on Hancox 1. Though you'll only see one if you travel to the empty continent of Sirocco. To give you some background, decades ago, there was a savage war between two planets. Unsurprisingly, one of them was the Peaceful Co-Prosperity Orb of Xin-Muong. So no quarter was asked or given. But when you think about it, there's no point in simply thermo-nuking a place until its surface turns to glass. Or bombarding it with asteroids deflected from their orbits. All you'd win is useless rock, uninhabitable for millennia. Also, you'd risk retaliation from other systems.

One dark night, some bright spark – or more likely a committee of bright sparks – came up with the perfect weapon to deploy against lightly armed civilians. Krillaz. Probably the ultimate terror weapon. The acronym – in rough translation – stands for Civilian Reduction Inimicals – Lankien Laboratories 4. By mixing up the acronym with the word 'killers', they became known as Krillaz. They're cheap and effective as well, so the politicians liked the concept.

So what's a Krilla when it's at home? Or in its stinking nest? A genetically spliced fright, bolting together the best and worst of several species to come up with a horror worse than your worst nightmare. I guess a Krilla is mostly based on the black rat, *rattus rattus* – which doesn't sound too bad, except nobody I know likes rats – to which has been added the viciousness of a weasel, the fearlessness of a wolverine, gorilla-like arms and iron jaws of a hyena.

It stands over a metre tall on two legs, hunched over leaving its better than rat-like front paws free. A Krilla's hide is usually a pallid grey, bald except for sparse patches of fur except along its spine which is green. Yes, somebody added chlorophyll to the mix so that the creature can survive even if its food supply runs low.

What else? Oh yes, its face. Although the boffins claimed they used chimps to give it enhanced intelligence, nobody believed them. The long face is a hideous combination of hi-man and rodent. And when did you see a chimp having oriental eyes with epicanthic folds? But if they used hi-man DNA, then they chose deoxyribonucleic acid from psychopaths, mass-murderers and the very, very worst that hi-mankind can throw up.

That's enough for me. I don't like thinking about those monstrosities any more than I have to. And I'm going where they hang out. You have another question? Okay, fire away... So what happens after Krillaz are used on civilians? Basically, Krillaz breed like the rats they originated from and there's nothing they like more than hi-man flesh. Hot and fresh. However, after they've depopulated an enemy area, you have to get rid of your Krillaz.

Solving this problem, the brain-boxes at Lankien labs made Krillaz genetically vulnerable to a virus. It causes a lethal respiratory illness – rats are very prone to pneumonia – that wipes out 99.9% of them within 48 to 72 hours. After that, you just need to send in clean-up SWAT squads to eradicate the survivors and then the now empty territory is yours to do with as you want.

And it worked like a dream – or a nightmare, depending on your point of view. Krillaz were used in several conflicts during the Interregnum. Of course, the secret of their manufacture got out – underfunded scientists like filthy lucre as much as anyone – and several variants on the original model showed up. Including a new type on Hancox 1.

Moving forwards, war broke out between Sirocco and the neighbouring continent of Khamsin. Both nations were evenly matched but seeking outright victory neither sought mediation. Their navies attacked each other's ships, supporting attempted invasion fleets. When this tactic had been tried and failed several times, the Dictator of Khamsin authorised the use of Krillaz.

Thousands of rat-men were air-lifted onto Sirocco and left to do what they do best – killing and eating and breeding and killing and eating and breeding some more... When every hi-man being – man, woman, and child – on Sirocco had either fled or been eaten alive, Khamsin sprayed the island with virus.

Except it didn't work, did it? Sure, a few died, maybe less than 5%, their corpses cannibalised by their fellows. The rest carried on happily breeding like rats. A healthy female Krilla can have three litters of six to eight pups a year. So Khamsin's scientists resprayed the island with a slightly different virus. This time, less than 1% were wiped out.

Realising they had won a pointless victory – Khamsin had beaten Sirocco but gained a useless island as a prize – they cut their losses and abandoned it to the Krillaz. However, news of what had happened leaked out via the Galactoweb. As well

as interstellar condemnation and sanctions, hunters licked their lips and descended in droves on Hancox 1.

There's never been a closed season or weapons restrictions on Krillaz. Just get yourself a permit and slaughter as many as you like. However, even the most bloodthirsty hunter's tally was useless – eradicating Krillaz is like trying to drain an ocean using a bucket. All the hunters did was teach the Krillaz – being semi-intelligent, they are fast learners – to be wary of hi-mans and even more cunning than before.

Also, Krillaz, being hideously ugly, don't make good trophies. They're not like the magnificent Yearn-horns on Gilead, Nov Austrasia's Basilisks or Sopol's Stripe-Strikers on Maguire's World. Individually, they're not overly impressive. But they don't attack singly – they prefer swarms. In their way, they are one of the more dangerous creatures in the known galaxy.

You might ask why I'm going to this hell-hole. Normally, I've got too much respect for my hide to go messing with Krillaz. Wouldn't want them within a million clicks. Until I got a message over the Galactoweb that made me drop everything and hurry to Hancox 1. One of those messages that leave you no option, not if you value your reputation – and want to earn big money.

Using my cranial implant, I re-accessed the message, its words replaying on my retina. I won't give you all its details – they don't matter. In a microlitre, my boss's best-friend's son had got himself into big trouble. Again. The lad was getting married to his second wife (I think) and decided to treat himself and his friends to a stag holiday hunting Krillaz. No, I don't get it neither. You're hitching yourself to the woman you love so you zoom off to some hell-hole planet to ingest booze and zap monsters. I suppose it's one last fling before domesticity.

Âgustin – that's the foolish lad's name – and his friends brought their armour and a whole arsenal of weaponry. They hired some all terrain vehicles; tough, reliable, go-anywhere machines and headed off to one of Sirocco's ruined cities called Bas-Hinna. They reached it – their GPS signals prove that – but then vanished from view. Sarrah, Âgustin's lovely fiancée, panicked and knowing my boss's reputation for trouble-shooting asked him to investigate.

Always ready to help an old friend – especially when those friends are seriously wealthy oligarchs – my boss agreed. So he charged as much as he thought

the market could stand – which was a lot, I can tell you – and then fired off a message to his best (ha-ha) operative to look into Âgustin's disappearance.

So here I am, Vic Vargo, doing my bit for interplanetary rescue. However, as my boss was sticking it to them big-time, he passed me some of the cream. One million Hydrans plus expenses if I rescued Âgustin or half a million for proof of his fate if dead.

Can't say fairer than that.

CHAPTER 2: I LAND ON HANCOX 1

On the space shuttle's screen I watched as Hancox 1 loomed closer. In the distance, the small red dwarf shone its rays onto a dull, gunmetal coloured world. Then we plunged through its thick, vapour filled atmosphere. Rain washed over the shuttle's portholes. So I switched views and immediately a map of the world came into view.

Hancox 1 is slightly smaller than Earth – 11,000 kilometres in diameter, rather than Earth's 12,700 – and somewhat less dense. That pleased me as it meant my Earth-muscles would make me stronger and more powerful than back home. It is mostly covered by water with eight smallish sub-continent and lots of little islands scattered over the ocean. Sirocco lies just under the equator on the daylight side. Nothing heads direct for Sirocco any more so the shuttle was heading for the city of Ul-Muglann on the nearby continent of Harmattan.

Searching the Galactoweb, I brought up some information. The day-side continents are covered with a moss-like flora that grows to a height of half a metre or so. Yes, I looked it up and the technical term for this stuff is *bryophyte*. There was more but the shuttle juddered as it was buffeted by a storm. The display blinked off to be replaced by a flashing warning and the shuttle pilot's voice came over the intraweb system.

"We are experiencing some turbulence at present. Please do not be alarmed...", that was one way to ensure panic, "...however, everything is under control and we expect to land at Ul-Muglann spaceport as usual. Thank you."

I looked over at the man in the next seat. With his hawk-like face and neatly trimmed beard, he looked like a local. He didn't seem particularly worried so I put my

fears to one side. The shuttle dropped through thick clouds and then I saw the spaceport loom up through my porthole. Lights gleamed and reflected from the rain-washed sky. The spaceport was on the edge of the continent and in the distance I saw Ul-Muglann itself beyond its boundaries.

None too soon, the shuttle touched down and came to a halt by the terminal. Moving forwards, I joined the queue for customs clearance.

"What is the reason for your visit?" the official asked in that neutral yet hostile tone they always use. I showed him my hunting certificate and the list of equipment I was bringing in. He stamped my e-Passport with more vigour than was necessary.

"Good hunting, *dost* – I hate Krillaz. My family had to flee Sirocco when they came."

"I'll bag some for you."

He grinned through his beard, friendlier now, and waved me through. I'd already arranged accommodation and transport and an automated ground-taxi whizzed me through wide streets flanked by low, white-grey buildings to my Hotel. The room was warm and comfortable, although bland – I could have upgraded to five-star but I don't feel comfortable with too much luxury – however, Âgustin's family were wealthy so I wasn't going to short myself neither.

Now I was planetside, I double-checked my plans. Tomorrow, I would be meeting a group of fellow hunters – only a fool goes after Krillaz by themselves. As one ruined city is as good as another, they happily agreed to go to Bas-Hinna with me. Also, like me, they didn't feel happy about leaving somebody trapped, surrounded by Krillaz.

I crossed to the view-screen window and looked out over Ul-Muglann. It was a depressing sight. Although the downfall wasn't as severe as before, the constant gales of this tide-locked world buffeted rain against the window. Up above, the sun was a dim red blur in the clouds, casting its diffuse rays over the drab city. Ugh. Picking up the console, I scrolled through the views until it seemed I was in a beach front apartment overlooking a beautiful coral atoll on some paradise world – Merciall, I guessed it to be. The beautiful people who live there walked on pink sands under the light of twin suns.

Perfect, I thought, as I lay down, switched off my neural implant and relaxed.

The following morning – though there's no such thing as a true morning on this world, of course – I caught the local shuttle to Sirocco. There weren't many passengers and most of them looked like hunters. The craft flew over storm-tossed seas. If you're interested, there's not much marine life on Hancox 1 – things similar to giant sea-slugs and slime-fish but that's about it.

Two hours later, the shuttle landed on the only part of Sirocco not infested with Krillaz. One narrow, rocky peninsula had been cleared of them and a fence sealed it off from the rest of the sub-continent. There was a landing field next to a small town. Nearly everyone there was in the military or else made a living by servicing hunters. Disembarking, I followed the rest of the hunters through clearance.

I had to sign a legal disclaimer saying that I didn't expect to be rescued if I got into difficulties and waiving all rights to sue the authorities. Nothing unexpected – par for the course. Also, they checked I'd had my vaccinations – as well as everything else, Krillaz carry disease. Then I was reunited with my weapons, which had earlier been sealed.

I was milling around Arrivals when a man approached me. "Vic Vargo?" he asked. He must have known who I was as my neural implant was broadcasting my identity. I guess he was being polite.

I checked him out. Luis Çrámerr, aged 42, a manager at Economou Interplanetary Logistics, Inc., a big multi-world outfit, that, you must have seen their lime-green starships on the trading routes – married with four children; his hobbies include... but I didn't have time to peruse that or his most recent holiday snaps, which he was broadcasting, although that pic of his wife surfing in a skimpy mono-kini looked worth spending time over.

"Pleased to meet you," Çrámerr continued. "Did you have a pleasant trip over? Come and interface with the others." Çrámerr shook my hand. His grip was firm and he made good eye-contact. Definitely the confident, hail-fellow-well-met management type. He guided me away from the luggage carousel to a café on the far side of Arrivals.

On the way, I looked at Çrámerr, wanting to get a feel for him on a gut level, rather than what his implant was telling me. Çrámerr was tall, good looking in a Nordic way with perfect teeth and ruler-straight nose. His full head of dark hair was swept back in a fashionable style. Perhaps to blend in with the locals, he had a neatly

trimmed beard. He was all set for the expedition into the interior and wore camouflage – purple-green on this world – under a multi-pocket battle vest.

Only thing – what was those silly accents doing under the C and over the a? Was that to make him stand out from the herd of lesser Cramerrs? So why not do it properly and throw accents over or under every letter? Perhaps he was saving that for the boardroom? Or perhaps I should stop moaning, take a leaf out of his book and look into changing my surname to Värög or something? Does that look more impressive?

Before we reached the café, I worked out who I would be travelling with, and not just because of their broadcasts. There were four people sitting around a table. One was obviously our guide. He was of average height with the locals' usual trimmed beard, tanned skin and hawk-like profile. He wore well-worn camouflage and his broadcast told me he had led many previous trips. Unless that was an advertising hoax, that reassured me. You need a man who knows what he's doing when you're after prey like Krillaz. His name was Farrie-Galv Kham.

The others were two men and a woman. All were executives with Economou Interplanetary and looking for promotion. I realised this was one of those team-building exercises designed to sort the synthi-sheep from the GM-goats. No doubt my new best friend, Luis Çrámerr, would be evaluating how they handled themselves on this trip. You know, see how they cope under life-and-death pressure and how that later translates into boardroom skills.

Being a sexist boar, as one of my female friends calls me, I turned to the woman first. She was called Clemency L'Alleyn and came from Neuf Gironde – one of those surprisingly common Francophone colonies. Way I hear it; you usually get great wine and cheese on their worlds but don't expect to get anything done during lunch. Compared with here, she must feel homesick for the great lifestyle back home. She wasn't broadcasting much – only the bare minimum. With her long, straight hair, porcelain skin, blue-ice eyes above high cheekbones and thin face with a longish nose, I marked her down as a Grade A ball-breaker.

The two male executives were much of a type, except physically. Good genes – undoubtedly enhanced – supportive families, followed by attending top Universities and then fast-tracked for success. Their names were Geroge NcDona and Hari Thalami. They both stood as Çrámerr and I approached and we all shook hands.

NcDona was a big guy, who looked like he did a lot of weights. E-tattoos moved under his skin creating different scenes. I reckoned his ancestors ultimately came from Angola. Thalami, on the other hand, was much smaller, neatly dressed, with straight black hair and mournful eyes. He bowed politely, and his broadcast said he was a native of the teardrop-shaped isle of Trapobana on Earth itself.

"This is the *hombre* I was telling you about," Çrámerr said by introduction. "We're going to help him search for his friend."

"When did you last hear from him?" Kham asked. His dark eyes searched mine. Undoubtedly he was also scrutinising my neural data. If he was any good, he'd be reading between the lines.

"Almost five weeks ago," I said. "It took me a little while to sort things out and get here."

Kham didn't say anything. He didn't have to. In his opinion, Âgustin was almost certainly dead, killed in a terrible way.

"His last transponder signal was received by satellite star date: HI-0I," I said. "Âgustin and his party had plenty of food and ammo. If they holed up somewhere secure in Bas-Hinna, then they should still be okay. His family persuaded the local military to send out a search party but they couldn't find anything. All the same, I owe it to Âgustin to double-check and...", turning to the whole group, "...I'd like to thank you all for your assistance."

They nodded. To avoid embarrassment, and to give them chance to study my data, I crossed to the counter and paid for coffee – well kaffe, but it was a good blend – and brought them over to the group. By now, they should know as much as they needed about me and Âgustin. Of course, there's info I share only with friends but they didn't expect to know that.

"I reckon there should be a bonus if we find Âgustin," Çrámerr joked.

"Like I say, I appreciate your help. You know he worked as an intern for Economou for a time?" I said.

"That's the big A1 reason we agreed to help," Çrámerr said, his voice a mellow bass.

We finished our kaffes and then left Arrivals. It had started raining again and we hurried over to where the hire company had our vehicle. Our luggage and weaponry had already been collected and taken on board. That's one of the benefits of

working for a huge interstellar outfit like Economou. Everyone bends over backwards for you – or your money – which comes to the same thing.

While Kham dealt with the paperwork, we checked out our vehicle, which would be our home and base for the next week. I was impressed. It was battle-scarred but more than up to the job of getting us to Bas-Hinna and back. It was an 8-wheel drive Steg-0-Saw All-Terrain Vehicle. A heavy, slab-sided, boxy ex-troop carrier with the rear compartment now converted into accommodation. It was armoured with Durarmor, reinforced studded tyres and a one-man turret protruded from the top next to a searchlight. It had been painted in wasp-like black and yellow stripes. Hard to miss in the gloom. The others piled inside and I followed. Unsurprisingly, Çrámerr slid behind the wheel. Typical Alpha-male.

As soon as Kham was on board – as the guide, he took the shotgun seat – we set off. I guess I wasn't the only one with butterflies in my stomach as the three executives were also quiet as they watched the view-screens. We drove through the town towards the perimeter fences. Another check of our e-Passports and then the guard buzzed open the gate. With a call of "good hunting," the gate slid open and we were through. Into the abandoned wilds of Sirocco. In the distance, another Steg was heading north – to the happy hunting grounds of the northern coastal region.

Çrámerr pumped the air and let rip a rebel yell. "Yee-haw," he cried. He turned to face us and the three executives followed his lead. "Yee-haw," but their yells were more muted and Thalami's was decidedly half-hearted.

"Luis can't hear you," he called back.

"YEE-HAW," they screamed, eager to outdo each other. They all wanted that promotion.

I kept my face to the screen. Our Steg-0-Saw was now crossing a sterile wasteland. For a distance of one kilometre from the fence, the authorities had a scorched earth policy. Nothing grew or moved. The Krillaz had initially attacked the fence, eager to scale it and get at the warm, succulent hi-man bodies behind it. They'd learned the hard way – at the cost of thousands of deaths – to stay away from the fence. Any Krilla showing its snout on the desolate wasteland found itself blasted to oblivion by automatic weaponry mounted along the fence.

But it was a dismal scene. Rain soaked grey rock beneath leaden clouds. What a world. It didn't get much better after we passed the scorched earth. Instead of rock, the terrain was covered by bryophytes. The plant grew to height of half a metre and

had ovoid spore cases on top of the stems. It was a dismal greyish, purplish green and spread all the way to the horizon. If necessary, Krillaz can eat bryophytes but they don't enjoy it. Flesh is their preferred diet.

Our vehicle trundled along a potholed road that was crumbling away to ruin.

"How far is it to Bas-Hinna?" Çrámerr asked.

Kham checked the GPS system. "Just over two thousand clicks."

At an average speed of 70 kph, that would mean a journey of less than thirty hours. I suppressed a groan. Thirty hours cooped up with these management types. Not my idea of a good time.

"We should have gone to Ul-Zhabbir on the north coast. They say the Krillaz are really virulent up there," NcDona said.

Çrámerr turned around to face the rear compartment. "Think of the glory when we rescue this Âgustin. There should be a company bonus for whoever finds him." That word 'bonus' grabbed their attention like nothing else. Good luck to them. I wasn't sharing my reward.

The scenery was nothing to hold their attention so after a few minutes; Clemency booted up her HandPad and started working on some office documents. Geroqe opened his case and showed Hari his Augmented Flux-Blaster. A good weapon but I thought too overpowered and slow for fast, numerous vermin like Krillaz. All the same, any Krilla hit by it would be atomised.

In turn, Hari showed off his Gatling PPD – a rapid fire weapon loaded with flechette shards that would shred any unarmoured enemy. That was more like it – no Krilla would stand a chance against it. Only problem, it was heavy on ammo and needed recharging frequently.

I soon had enough of their company so I climbed up into the little turret and swivelled about. There wasn't much to see and bryophytes covered everything as far as the eye could see. Looking up, the sun had disappeared behind the clouds. Soon, it rained and water bounced off the turret's view-screen. It was going to be a long journey.

We passed a few towns, the low buildings crumbling into ruins. Once I saw movement – or thought I did – but Krillaz aren't stupid enough to attack a heavily armoured vehicle. After a while, I dropped down from the turret, ate a rehydrated meal – no water shortage on this planet – and then lay down on one of the bunks

welded to the side. Switching my neural implant to sleep mode gave me a guaranteed eight hours rest.

I went out like a light.

CHAPTER 3: THE RUINED CITY.

Nothing seemed to have changed when I woke. Gale driven rain buffeted our ATV as it trundled through low, eroded hills covered with ubiquitous bryophytes. In the far distance – not that far, given the poor visibility – was another abandoned town. I have never seen such an uninspiring view.

Fortunately, I didn't have to mix much with the executives. Now we were nearly at Bas-Hinna, they were more nervous and apprehensive. I guess that safely in their office suites on the thousandth plus floor of a skyscraper on some highly urbanised world, a week hunting Krillaz didn't seem bad. Even makes a nice change from corporate meetings. Now they were almost on top of the beasties, it didn't seem such a great idea. But they still had to shine in front of Çrámerr to secure that promotion.

Bas-Hinna loomed into view. Farrie-Galv Kham resumed his place behind the wheel and guided the Steg-0-Saw along what had once been the main highway leading in. The executives looked through the view-screens and laughed and joked among themselves. Putting a brave face on things, I guess. Don't forget, they were all looking to impress Luis Çrámerr. I took my usual seat up in the turret and studied the terrain. Was this the last place Âgustin had seen? I hoped not.

The road – still just as potholed – led past low buildings, mostly built of native stone and Konkreet. They had once been whitewashed to relieve the drabness but that had long since washed away except in the most sheltered spots. All windows had long since gone and more bryophytes grew out of the gaps. Like all places abandoned by hi-manity, it was a sad, eerie place; a relic of abandoned hopes and dreams.

Of course, we were all keeping an eye open for Krillaz but didn't see any. They're not stupid and no way were they going to suicide charge a heavily armoured vehicle.

Kham drove over a bridge spanning a canal, made a right turn, down another wide avenue until he pulled up in what would have been Bas-Hinna's main plaza. It was surrounded by taller buildings – each four storeys high. One still had its sign – 'Concert Hall'. For some reason, that upset me. I thought of all those locals enjoying performances – until the Krillaz came and devoured those who didn't flee.

"These are the coordinates where Âgustin's last GPS signal came from, *dost?*" asked Kham.

I swung down from the turret and checked the display. "Yes, here," I confirmed.

"Okay, let's get suited and booted and hunt us some Krillaz," said Çrámerr, a little too loudly. Maybe his nerves were getting to him as well. There was no reason to delay – there's no night time this side of Hancox 1. Everyone pulled on body armour and helmets – not military-grade battle-dress, of course, more ex-riot police stuff. Enough to cope with a Krilla's teeth and claws. Over our armour, we wore battle-vests holding spare ammunition, a first aid pouch, rations, compressed water and a durasteel combat knife.

There was a lot of jostling and laughing as they dressed. I felt a bit sorry for Clemency as the only woman in the group but she didn't seem to mind. Not that she should. Clemency L'Alleyn had a hard, toned body with a golden holo-tattoo of a Sun-Dragon on her back. It writhed sinuously, looking almost alive. Didn't expect her to be adorned like that. People always surprise you, don't they?

When everyone was ready, Kham opened the rear tailgate and we trooped outside. Despite butterflies in our stomachs, it felt good to leave the confines of the vehicle. As the guide, safety on this trip was his responsibility so Kham inspected their weapons and armour but he didn't need to check mine.

"Just a few things before we set off." I'd expected this talk. "Most important, never, never, never leave the group and head off on your own. We're looking for Vargo's client, Âgustin – or his remains – but even if you find him or anything else, don't go off by yourself. Remember, Krillaz love to pick off people by themselves."

"In case of emergency, have you logged these coordinates into your personal GPS?" They all nodded, even the normally brash Luis Çrámerr.

"Then let's go hunting – and good luck," he finished.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

