



**NOSTROMO  
LOST IN TIME**

By

**MICHEL POULIN**

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A SCIENCE-FICTION NOVEL

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## **WARNING TO POTENTIAL READERS**

**THIS NOVEL CONTAINS GRAPHIC DESCRIPTIONS OF WAR, VIOLENCE AND SEX, AS WELL AS COARSE LANGUAGE AND CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECTS THAT ARE UNSUITABLE FOR CHILDREN.**

### **ABOUT THIS NOVEL**

This novel is a sequel to my NOSTROMO ON THE PROWL and is the ninth novel in the Kostroma Series. It is continuing the adventures in Space of Captain Tina Forster and of her mighty cargo ship NOSTROMO and her crew. The year is 2337 and Humanity, despite having won a series of crucial battles against the carnivorous Space Predators, is still facing a mortal threat from them. Tina Forster and her ship thus have to stay vigilant, for the sake of the whole of Humanity.

### **OTHER BOOKS BY THIS AUTHOR**

(All available free online at [Free-Ebooks.net](http://Free-Ebooks.net), or can be ordered direct via email to the author at [natai@videotron.ca](mailto:natai@videotron.ca).)

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## CHAPTER 1 – BACK AT WORK



**11:04 (Universal Time)**

**Saturday, January 16, 2337**

**Small craft hangar complex, frame level 1,070**

**Super-heavy Armed Merchant Ship NOSTROMO**

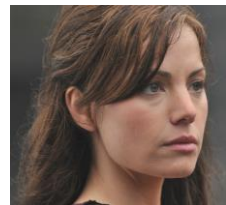
**In low orbit of planet Asiana (XO-1c), in the XO-1 System**

**536 light years from Earth, Coroneae Borealis Constellation**

When **Tina Forster** disembarked from her personal yacht **FRIENDSHIP**, closely followed by her personal bodyguard, Security Officer Stacy Keibler, she was met at the foot of her yacht's access ramp by her husband, **Michel Koniev**, who asked her at once a question in an anxious tone.

"So, how did it go at the meeting of the Spacers' League's High Council on Providence, Tina?"

"Better than expected, Michel. The majority of the High Council members accepted my explanation about why I hid from them the existence of our matter converter cannons."



"A majority but not all of them?" said Michel, a bit dismayed by that answer, making Tina nod her head and smirk.

"Yup! Two members from the Pallas Mining Industries Consortium voted against me, while Minister of Defense Cardona voted 'abstain'. To her credit, Chairman Mercier fired Cardona right after the meeting and temporarily assumed his duties. At least now we know who our enemies in the High Council are."

Her answer made Michel show frustration then.

"The Pallas Consortium, again! Too bad that Jacobus Stein is now too old to continue heading it. He always was a decent, honest friend to us but his children and many of his associates have proven to be mostly bigoted, power-hungry and greedy individuals."

"Well, the present CEO of the Pallas Mining Industries Consortium, Michael Kendrik, who was chosen by Jacobus Stein to succeed his no-good son Paul, did vote to support me. Kendrik was also not pleased at all at seeing two of his subordinate systems' governors vote against me and to have a third one hesitate before voting 'yea'. Unfortunately, I doubt that Kendrik fully grasps how much of a vipers' nest he has under him right now. I also suspect that Paul Stein, despite having been voted out as Chairman of the Spacers League three years ago and being officially disgraced, is secretly scheming against us with various Pallas high-level executives and systems governors. What I am most afraid of now is that, with the Spacers League now in possession of the design sketches of our matter converter cannon, Paul Stein and his allies would get their hands on a number of our new cannons. If that ever happens, then I just can't dismiss the possibility that those Pallas assholes would use those cannons, either to blackmail the High Council or to destroy their opponents, in which case we would end up with a fratricidal war within the Spacers League."

"Great! As if we didn't have enough to worry about already because of those monstrous Space Predators. We may have inflicted a number of stinging defeats on those carnivorous monsters but we still don't know where the rest of their fleet of asteroid ships is and, especially, where their remaining home worlds are. As long as we will not have eliminated them completely, they will continue to constitute a grave threat to Humanity and to the other sentient races in this sector of the galaxy. Talking of other sentient races, what do you make of the fact that the Vorlaks proved willing to accept our help to save their world?"



"I must say that I was myself surprised by their willingness to cooperate with my ships in the defense of Voronkia. It shows you that the old saying that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' seems to hold around the galaxy. Overall, I am now confident that they have learned their lessons and will keep to themselves on Voronkia."

"I hope that you are right about that, Tina, for the sake of the Hoshis of Hyanesu, who are living next door to Voronkia and who were once being under constant attack and occupation by the Vorlaks. How long will we keep a force of security androids and of Mobile Robotic Gun Systems on Hyanesu as a local defense force?"

"With the Space Predators soundly defeated in the Gliese 581 System and the Vorlaks apparently having become reasonable, I think that the sole continued presence in orbit of the Spacers League battle station MJOLNIR will be sufficient to ensure the safety of the Hoshis on Hyanesu. However, I prefer to confer with our command staff before taking a decision on the future deployment of our force of security androids and MRGSs."

"Agreed! Well, let's go back to our suite, where our little Janet is anxiously waiting for you."

Tina smiled at the mention of their six-year-old daughter.

"I myself can't wait to hug and kiss her, Michel."

Tina then turned to look at her tall bodyguard.

"Since we are now safely aboard my ship, you are free to return to your ship routine, Stacy. Thank you again for your services on Providence."

"It was my pleasure, Tina." replied Stacy Keibler, who then walked away from the couple in order to return to her apartment in the Habitat Ring Complex of the huge cargo ship.

Walking to the ship's central core spine, made of a sixty-meter-diameter armored tube extending vertically through the forward half of the 3,000-meter-long giant cargo ship, **Stacy Keibler** entered the core's rotunda, her single suitcase in one hand, then went to one of the lifts lining the inner core wall of the rotunda and called a cabin. A few seconds later, a cabin stopped at her level and Stacy entered it as soon as its doors slid open. Once inside, she punched in the number 580, which was the frame level number of the ship's forest habitats and of the ship's administrative center. On the NOSTROMO, as in the late KOSTROMA, the floor levels



were indicated by the distance in meters between the forward tip of the massive bow shield dome of the ship and the said floor level. In this case, it meant that her cabin traveled up by 490 meters before stopping at the level of the ship's administrative center. Walking out of the lift's cabin, Stacy crossed the fifteen-meter-wide central rotunda hallway and walked down its western hallway, passing by the ship's firefighting center, the banking center, the customer services offices and the telecommunications services center before arriving at the western airlock of the core section. Since the ship was not on any alert status, the armored doors of that airlock were open, letting dozens of people circulate freely in and out of the core section. Walking down the 500-meter-long gallery leading to the Habitat Ring section, where her apartment was located, she looked alternatively to her left and right through the large transparent armored windows of the communication gallery. Stacy was able to see some of the animals and birds living inside the Tropical Forest Habitat and the Temperate Rain Forest Habitat, which were separated from each other by the partition walls of the gallery, each of which covered 18.2 hectares of vegetation and contained hundreds of trees. Halfway to the Habitat Ring, Stacy passed by a family of ASEAN<sup>1</sup> citizens who had stopped to look at a big porcupine which was lazily walking through the temperate rain forest, near the gallery's partition wall. Right now, a large part of the 26,000 Asian passengers the NOSTROMO had brought from Earth to the XO-1 System was still aboard, waiting for the installation on the planet's surface of the hundreds of prefabricated modules and elements carried by the giant cargo ship to be completed before disembarking. Once ready to receive its first colonists, the planet Asiana would then become the first Human star system to be inhabited by citizens from Earth rather than from the Spacers League. By colonizing Asiana with the help of Tina's corporation, the ASEAN was hoping to relieve the longstanding excess population and limited resources pressures it had been enduring for over 260 years now.

Stacy finally entered the Habitat Ring Complex via the large armored airlock linking it with the communication gallery coming from the centerline core section. She then turned right along the Main Promenade, sandwiched between the twenty-story-high habitat complex proper and the giant ring aquarium which ran along the outer side of the section. That aquarium had a circumference of 4,110 meters, was fifty meters-wide, had

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<sup>1</sup> ASEAN: Association of South-East Asian Nations.

a maximum depth of twenty meters and sheltered a wide variety of marine life visible through its thick transparent inner wall. As for its outer wall, it was made of a giant continuous holographic display screen covering its whole surface, a screen on which a variety of vistas could be displayed. Right now, its lower, submerged section showed an apparently limitless deep sea, while its upper section showed the surface of Asiana and the black of the surrounding deep Space.

Eventually arriving at the nearest lift from her apartment and entering its cabin, Stacy went up three levels and exited on Level 570, on which her apartment and those of most of the other security androids were situated. First passing by a large open-air lounge-patio used by the resident security androids, she finally arrived at the door of her apartment, numbered 570-216, and unlocked it with her magnetic security pass, then entered what was her personal space on this ship, a ten meter by four-meter apartment with four rooms: a living room; a cybernetics maintenance alcove and weapons vault; a private study cum workshop and storage room and a small bathroom. There was no kitchen or dining room, as security androids, while able to ingest food and liquids if need be, didn't need to eat or drink to survive. Their limited ability to take in food and drinks was meant strictly for social purposes, so that they could mingle with Humans and act like them, thus attracting less attention from those who still looked with hostility or suspicion at security androids like Stacy, who had been built as a security force for the New Haven Corporation. Unfortunately, such ill-will was still too frequent around the Spacers League, despite the stellar service accomplished in combat by Stacy and her android comrades. One had equated that hostility to the old forms of racism which had been too common on Earth during past centuries and which still existed in a number of places. The one thing her apartment had in place of a kitchen and dining room was a small counter with a compact refrigerator, a sink, a microwave oven and a coffee machine, all meant for her to be able to receive a human guest in her small apartment. Another feature meant to help her receive a human guest was a large sofa in her living room which could unfold into a wide bed. While Stacy did not need to sleep, ever, androids like her were able to have sex with Humans, since they had anatomically correct and functioning sexual organs, if you excepted the biological ability to reproduce. Since security androids could not have real 'feelings', they had to fake pleasure when having sex with Humans. However, the contrary was not true. As one man had told her once, she could really 'fuck the brains out' of a man...or of a woman. Male-like androids

were equally able to please Human partners and had become very popular with a certain class of middle-aged female passengers commonly called 'Cougars'. Many of those women in fact often booked passage on the NOSTROMO just to be able to enjoy some first-rate sex with male androids, who were very well endowed by average human standards and were experts at using their attributes, on top of being able to keep it up indefinitely. The small bathroom attached to her apartment was also meant mostly for human guests but the shower stall was one feature Stacy used often, in order to wash off any grime or dust particles collected during work. A special type of soap meant for androids also helped give a more natural human scent to her artificial skin. All in all, someone would have to be quite perceptive in order to see that she was not a real woman.

Her first move once inside her apartment was to drop off her suitcase in her private study cum workshop/storage room, where she quickly unpacked it and hanged or shelved her things in her storage and clothes locker. Then she sat at her computer station and reported herself as having returned to normal duties after going to Providence with Tina Forster. The response she got from her superior and commander of the First Security Legion, Chief Centurion Jehanne De Domrémy, pleased her, telling her that she was on her own time until tomorrow morning, when she was going to fly out on a patrol around Asiana in the heavy fighter in which she was the copilot. The question for her now was how to occupy the time between now and tomorrow morning. Closing her computer and getting up on her feet, she walked out of her private study and into her living room, where she cycled through the small airlock between her apartment and its small, five-meter square balcony overlooking the temperate rain forest habitat bordering her section of the Habitat Ring. There, she took in a deep breath, inhaling the various smells from the trees and vegetation, which were then instantly analyzed by her olfactive sensors. Somehow, that often seemed to stimulate her thought process. In the present case, it decided her to watch an old martial arts action movie on her video entertainment unit. Stacy was an expert practitioner of unarmed combat and martial arts in her free time and the past decades and centuries had seen countless such movies being produced, some good, some bad and some average ones. Thankfully, copies of those old films have been constantly remade in the succession of electronic formats used during the past centuries. What interested her in those old movies was not the acting per say rather than the fighting techniques and moves employed. Sitting in her

sofa facing her entertainment unit, she called up the vast selection of old films available in the NOSTROMO's video library and ended up selecting a 20th Century movie featuring a Chinese-American actor and martial artist named Bruce Lee. One of the security androids on the NOSTROMO happened to have been designed and built to be an avatar of that same Bruce Lee and had been programmed to practice the same martial arts moves than the historical Bruce Lee. Stacy was thus going to be able to practice in the future with that other android the moves she was going to view in this old movie today.

### **12:56 (Universal Time)**

#### **Executive Apartment # 3, Level 505**

#### **Centerline core section of the A.M.S. NOSTROMO**

"You already have to go work again, Mommy? But you arrived from Providence less than two hours ago and this is Saturday. Can't you stay longer with me?"

In response to her six-year-old daughter Janet, Tina crouched in front of her, an understanding smile on her lips, while gently holding Janet's head with both hands.

"I know that you missed me, sweetie, and I very much appreciate that. However, as captain of this ship and owner of the New Haven corporation, I have responsibilities towards all of us, including about our collective security and welfare, and I can't neglect those responsibilities. However, the meeting I am going to should not go on for very long and I promise you that I will be back with you well before supper time. Will that do, Janet?"

The young girl, still showing some disappointment, did nod her head slowly at Tina's question.

"I understand, Mommy, but please come back as quickly as you can."

"I promise!" said Tina before kissing her daughter on her forehead. She then walked out of the family's suite, her attaché case in one hand, and headed towards the nearby command conference room of her ship, which was situated on the same level as her suite. Entering her **command conference room** after a short walk, she found that most of those invited to the



meeting were already sitting around the conference table. The sole person still missing, Chief Engineer Rose Tillman, actually entered the room a mere ten seconds after Tina. Waiting until Rose was seated, Tina then spoke to the eight members of her command group, to which she had recently added Janet Robeson, the now retired ex-Chairman of the High Council of the Spacers League, who now bore the title of 'political advisor' of her corporation.

"Thank you for coming, my friends. I asked you to assemble so that I could brief you on how the last meeting of the High Council went and on what reactions I got to my request to keep the use of our matter converter cannon strictly to fight the Space Predators and other eventual major threats to Humanity and to other races allied with us. Basically, my reasons to keep our super weapon secret were generally well accepted by all, including by Chairman Mercier. Where things went partly downhill was when the High Council held a vote about pledging the non-use of our matter converter cannon against Human ships, groups and star systems. All the members voted to honor that pledge, all except Governor Berman of El Dorado and Governor Kim Dae Wo of Mu who voted 'nay', and Minister of Defense Juan Cardona, who abstained. While the vote of the High Council was in my favor, the fact that two planet governors who are executives of the Pallas Mining Industries refused to pledge to use our super weapon only in the defense of Humanity is in my mind very worrying. As you know too well, we have had our share of problems in the past with the Pallas Mining Industries and with its ex-chairman Paul Stein, who was also for a time Chairman of the High Council before being ousted for abusing his authority and showing blatant discrimination against us and our security androids."

There were nods to that around the table, including from Chief Centurion Jehanne de Domrémy, the first security android to have been activated some eight and a half years ago and the senior commander of their security android force. She and the other security androids had seen their status of full citizens of the Spacers League temporarily taken away on order of then Chairman Paul Stein, while instances of anti-android racism and discrimination had been experienced on star systems controlled by the Pallas Mining Industries. It had taken the angry reaction of Jacobus Stein, the aging founder of the Pallas Mining Industries and a good friend of Tina Forster, to clean up that stinky state of affair. Tina then continued on.

"Now, I had a private conversation with Chairman Jeanne Mercier after that High Council meeting, during which she pledged to me that only ships of the Spacers

League's Navy will be retrofitted with our new weapon and that no corporation or star system's local defense force would get it. She even told me that she intended our Navy ships to enforce that rule by conducting spot checks of any ships suspected of being illegally armed with matter converter cannons. In view of the refusal by two Pallas Mining Industries executives to honor the pledge taken by the other members of the High Council, I suspect that our Navy will be mostly checking out ships belonging to the Pallas Mining Industries, a measure I wholly support. So, hopefully, this will not result in serious problems for us in the future."

"May I disagree with that assessment of yours, Tina?" said at once Janet Robeson, a still solid eighty-year-old woman with an iron character. "While I have officially retired from active politics after many decades of service, I still follow closely the state of politics around the Spacers League and on Earth and I am alarmed by the way anti-android propaganda and lies are still circulating around the systems controlled by the Pallas Mining Industries. Worse, a lot of that propaganda and lies emanates from local government officials who are still sympathetic to Paul Stein and his lackeys. If that corporation would have its ways, we and the New Haven Corporation would be booted out of the Spacers League and our security androids would then be legally considered as nothing more than simple robots with no individual legal rights."

"But Michael Kendrick, the CEO of the Pallas Mining Industries, voted in favor of my pledge, Janet. He also looked angry when Berman and Kim voted against it."

"Tina, I do not doubt the honesty and moral rectitude of CEO Kendrick. The problem is that I heard quite a few rumors about him being the target of a campaign meant to oust him as CEO of his corporation. Some of those rumors even mention the possibility of Paul Stein being returned to power as the next chairman and CEO of the Pallas Mining Industries. In addition to those rumors, the most recent opinion polls on Mu, El Dorado and in the Trappist-1 System show that many in their populations are still hostile to or suspicious of our security androids. Worse, those poll results continue to go up, despite the heroic deeds of our androids and of our crews against the Space Predators."

"But that's utter nonsense, Janet!" protested at once Winnie Zambela, the financial officer of the NOSTROMO and the person in charge of its commercial dealings and contracts. "How could intelligent people believe such hogwash proffered against our androids?"

Janet Robeson replied to that with a pinched smile.

“As Tina said herself a number of times while quoting an ancient movie, ‘never underestimate the predictability of stupidity’, Winnie. Humanity may have advanced tremendously in terms of science and technology but it still counts many morons and gullible idiots in its midst. If all Humans would show intelligence and common sense while dealing with each other, then racism and wars would have disappeared centuries ago.”

There was a moment of awkward silence following those words, with Ahmed Jibril, the chief of security on the NOSTROMO, asked a question in a hesitant tone.

“So, what do we do about that now?”

It was again Janet Robeson who answered that.

“In terms of the security of our ship, crew, androids and corporation as a whole, we should let the Spacers League Navy take care of enforcing this new rule about our matter converter cannon. In commercial terms, we should become very cautious with our dealings with the Pallas Mining Industries and during any visit or transit stops at one of their worlds. Specifically, our security androids should avoid visiting or disembarking on those worlds, in order to avoid possible incidents of harassment or discrimination. I have no doubts that they could easily defend themselves from direct physical attacks but I would be more worried about the extra hostile propaganda which could be generated by any incident.”

The android avatar of **SPIRIT**, the central artificial intelligence computer of the NOSTROMO, was the next one to speak up.

“There is one thing that we should do about this situation, right now, which concerns the HD 138525 System. As you all know, it was mapped by one of our heavy fighters while it was searching for the missing prospector ship GOLDEN NUGGET. That system is within the direct sector of responsibility of our corporation and has next to no lifeforms in it due to its young age as a star system, so was quickly recognized by the High Council as belonging to the New Haven Corporation. While it harbors no lifeforms other than microbes, that system holds some very rich metal ore deposits on two of its moons and in its asteroid belt. Since we don’t have ourselves the equipment and resources needed to fully exploit such extra mineral riches, we opened competitive bids with a number of corporations which could be interested in leasing from us the rights to mining those deposits. The Pallas Mining Industries was one of the corporations which stated its interest in leasing those mining rights from us.





In view of the obvious hostility demonstrated towards us by the Pallas Mining Industries executives, I would suggest that we withdraw our offer to the Pallas Mining Industries and instead concentrate on the bids offered by the Ceres Consortium and by the Vesta Corporation, two entities which have proven to be dependable friends of ours.”

Heads nodded around the table at that suggestion, with a smiling Tina supporting it verbally.

“An excellent suggestion, SPIRIT. Anybody against that? No? Then we will do so. Winnie, please advise the executives at the Ceres Consortium and at the Vesta corporation of this before advising the following day the Pallas Mining Industries of our decision. If the latter asks why we did this, simply tell them that we lost confidence in their dependability as a potential customer.”

“I am sure that they will love that, Tina.” replied Winnie Zambela in a sarcastic tone.

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