



THE FIGHTING NOSTROMO

**BY
MICHEL POULIN**

THE FIGHTING NOSTROMO

SCIENCE-FICTION NOVEL

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WARNING TO POTENTIAL READERS

THIS FICTION 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 MIGHTY NOSTROMO and is the sixth novel in the Kostroma Series. Its actions take place during the early 24th Century, when Humanity has finally been able to break out of the Solar System and is now expanding through the habitable star systems close to our own system. The armed merchant ship NOSTROMO is being completed at the Avalon Space Yards and is due soon to replace the mighty KOSTROMA, Captain Tina Forster's glorious ship, destroyed when it rammed a monstrous alien ship and saved Humanity and many other races from a horrible fate at the hands of a race of intelligent but savage carnivorous creatures. That alien ship may have been destroyed but how many more such ships are still roaming the galaxy? Where are they from? Will more alien ships threaten Humanity and its newly colonized worlds busy building themselves towards self-sufficiency?

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CHAPTER 1 – PREPARING FOR A FIGHT



Wolf 1061 shining on the landscape of New Haven.

07:53 (Local Eastern Time)

Thursday, June 7, 2328

Corporate headquarters of the New Haven Planetary Corporation

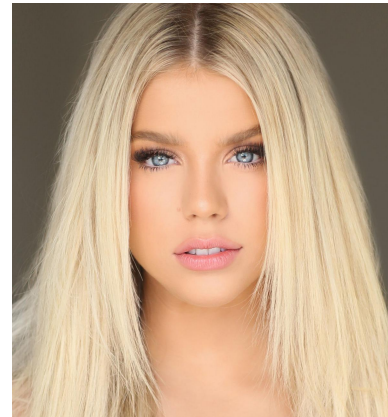
Camelot, New Haven (Wolf 1061 Ca), first moon of planet New Shouria.

Wolf 1061 System, 13.8 light-years from Earth

The building housing the headquarters of the New Haven Planetary Corporation, a six-story tower of glass and steel, could be described as modern and functional but not as luxurious or extravagant. In fact, one could search the whole moon without finding a single building or installation on it that could be called luxurious. That was actually to be expected on New Haven, a world dedicated as an eco-friendly agrarian world and refugee resettlement center. Much of its population was composed of refugees from Earth, poor people victims of wars, famines, persecutions or a mix of all those three factors. When she had been given possession of New Haven, which was then a mostly semi-arid moon with no sentient life on it, as a gift from the Koorivars for having found and saved two of their refugee ships, Captain Tina Forster had decided to dedicate it to the role of helping the dispossessed and the downtrodden of Earth. She thus had used her own assets and funds to build a new agrarian and egalitarian society on the moon.

Themselves refugees from the long-destroyed Gliese 667 System and now living on both Earth and on New Shouria, the planet around which New Haven orbited, the Koorivars had been too happy to help finance and support Tina Forster's humanitarian project. The results of all this today garnered universal and well-deserved praise, on top of providing a new life to over 160,000 ex-refugees from Earth.

Eve Silisca entered the corporate building at a calm pace, knowing that she still had a few minutes to spare before her meeting with Tina Forster was due. She returned the smile of the young man at the reception desk, who discretely admired her as she passed by his desk, on her way to the banks of elevators. By all standards, Eve was a stunningly beautiful and tall young woman who attracted more than her lot of male stares,



as well as some female stares. Her physical charms were further enhanced by her incredible linguistic abilities and by her sharp intellect, all things which made her the perfect hostess. Unfortunately, her old position as a passengers' hostess on the A.M.S. KOSTROMA, Tina Forster's giant cargo ship, did not exist anymore, for the good reason that the KOSTROMA itself didn't exist anymore, having been destroyed in a suicide charge which had saved the Drazts of Ross 128 from a huge alien asteroid ship full of carnivorous intelligent predators. That desperate action had saved from a horrible fate the Drazts, as well as preventing those aliens, now called 'Space Predators', from coming to the Solar System after eating their way through the Drazts in the Ross 128 System.

Soon arriving in the small visitors' lounge on which the doors of the offices of the top managers of New Haven opened, Eve went straight to the door simply marked 'Tina Forster' and knocked on it at precisely eight o'clock. Getting a muffled 'come in', she opened the door and entered Tina's office, finding her friend sitting behind her work desk. However, Tina was not presently typing on her computer or reading some report. Rather, she held in her hands a plastic model of her old ship, the A.M.S. KOSTROMA, while looking at it, nostalgia showing on her face. Eve knew how much she had been both fond and proud of her ship. It after all had fought in the Jovian Uprising of 2315 and had been pivotal in the victory of the space colonies over the tyrannical central government

of the Earth Federation. At the age of 41, Tina Forster was still a pretty woman with a fit body, brown hair and grey eyes. While she was widely known as an expert spaceship handler and as a master tactician and strategist when it came to space combat, Eve knew that she was first and foremost a kind, compassionate and generous woman who deeply cared about the others around her. Putting the plastic ship model back on her desk, Tina got up from her chair and came to Eve with a smile and an extended hand.



“Thank you for coming, Eve. How are you today?”

“Very well, thank you!” replied Eve as a matter of routine while shaking hands with Tina. In truth, Eve didn’t feel anything special about this day, or about any other day, for the good reason that she couldn’t feel true emotions. Tina knew that but still acted with her as if she was an ordinary human person, something Eve considered most respectful on her part. Many others who knew about Eve’s true nature would have been drier in their approach to her, mostly because they would have considered polite pleasantries superfluous with an android like her. After shaking hands with her, Tina invited Eve to go sit around the low coffee table set in one corner of her office. Once sitting in a sofa facing Tina’s easy chair, Eve spoke up.

“So, what do you want to discuss with me this morning, Tina?”

“What we will need to do during the coming weeks and months, Eve. My beloved KOSTROMA may have destroyed that horrific alien predator ship two days ago, at the cost of its own destruction, but we would be foolish in thinking that the threat from these Space Predators is over for good. Eventually, we will encounter another alien asteroid ship or, worse, one or more of them will find us. Then, when that happens, we will need to be prepared for them. If not, the whole of Humanity could end up being used as a reserve of meat for those monsters.”

Eve slowly nodded her head once at those words, another reaction which had been programmed into her to make her appear to be a real human being.

“I agree wholeheartedly with you on that, Tina. Hopefully, the Spacers’ League’s Navy will learn the lessons from our encounter and battle with the Space Predators and will adapt its tactics and weapons accordingly.”

"I hope that as well, Eve. I sent yesterday to the Navy Headquarters my report of the battle, which included a number of recommendations about how to defeat the Space Predators. If they are not total idiots, they will heed my advice on that subject."

"I hope so too, but I am not totally certain that they will do so, Tina. After all, the Spacers' League's Navy is staffed by human beings, persons with emotions, ambitions, personal opinions, biases, likes and dislikes. Their reactions and response to your report could still be tainted by some measure of jealousy, personal biases...or plain incompetence. Past human history has shown plenty of times that higher authorities don't always act in the most judicious or intelligent manner, especially if they hold some kind of prejudice or bias in the matter at hand. Take the example of World War Two, the most destructive war ever in Humanity's history. That war showed numerous examples of wrong, often disastrous decisions or actions taken due to plain incompetence, underestimation of the enemy, racial bias or personal hubris."

Tina, who was a big enthusiast about studying history, particularly when it came to naval warfare, smiled at Eve's reply.

"Yes, a few examples come to my mind right away, like Pearl Harbor, the fall of Singapore, the Battle of Savo Island and the War on the Eastern Front between the Germans and the Soviets. I could add as examples the Korean War and the Vietnam War of the Twentieth Century. As for earlier wars and battles, there are too many examples of stupid or wrong military moves for me to list them all. Still, I am hoping that our admirals at Navy Headquarters will prove more competent and clear-minded than those collection of historical buffoons. However, when it comes to the threat posed by the Space Predators, simply hoping for the best just won't do. I thus wanted to speak with you in order to make sure that we ourselves will be as well prepared as possible. I know that my new ship, the NOSTROMO, won't be completed for another sixteen months but we still have time to incorporate some of the lessons of our battle of two days ago into its design."

"I agree! I myself have made a list of things we could do to defend against the Space Predators, things which should be incorporated into the design of the NOSTROMO."

"You did? Tell me about it, Eve!" replied Tina, becoming instantly quite attentive. In response, Eve did her best to keep her response short and concise, as there were many things in her list and exposing all of her ideas in detail would take quite a while.

"First, we definitely need to never come close enough to a Space Predators' asteroid ship to allow it to use its transporter technology to beam boarding shuttles and crews on top or inside our ships. From the experience we gained in studying the past battles with the Space Predators, the maximum operational range of their teleportation device seems to be around 1,300 kilometers. So, one of the rules we should follow is to never get near that kind of distance from a Predator ship. Ideally, we should keep a minimum distance of at least 2,000 kilometers between our ships and their ships. Secondly, we need to greatly reinforce both our ships' close-in defenses and internal security, in order to destroy any boarding craft or Predators which would appear near or in our ships. Those close-in defenses could be composed of a mix of external mini-turrets, internal security defensive devices dispersed all around the inside of our ships, in order to react instantly to any boarders, and internal security personnel armed with disintegrator rifles and pistols and equipped with force shields vests. Thirdly, while our tactic of using a micro-jump to penetrate the force shields of a Predator asteroid ship worked very well in the case of the KOSTROMA, we need to make our missiles able to do such micro-jumps. Finally, we definitely need to have more powerful laser and disintegrator ship guns, which are able to pass through force shields, in order to inflict more serious damage at a distance on Predator ships. Even the KOSTROMA's main laser batteries, which were the most powerful ones ever mounted on a Human ship, were not powerful enough to punch through the thick nickel-iron crust of the Predator ship we fought against. In contrast, the Predators' purple laser beams proved to be at least three times as powerful as the KOSTROMA's lasers. This means that laser batteries of less than ten gigawatts each will be basically useless. As for our disintegrator batteries, we will definitely need much more powerful models. Concerning our rail guns, the Predators' force shields actually rendered them totally useless. Such rail gun armament should thus be eliminated completely from the design of the NOSTROMO. I could go on about more things, like ways to use drone decoy and electronic jamming craft to confuse the Predators' fire control systems, but listing them all would take me close to one hour."

Tina nodded and smiled at all that, pleased to see that Eve had already made a thorough analysis of their problem concerning the Space Predators.

"I am giving you an 'A' on your proposals, Eve. Basically, my report I sent to Providence yesterday contained recommendations that nearly mirror your own ideas. However, I need to cover in more detail with you one of your proposals: that about

internal ship security defenses. In the brief war against the Drazts, before we became friends and allies, Spirit proved invaluable, notably by directing the internal defenses of the KOSTROMA against the few very brave Drazts who managed to assault and board our ship. I certainly intend to have the internal defense stations planned for the NOSTROMO to be greatly augmented in numbers compared to what is presently planned in its design at the Avalon Space Yards. With Spirit in overall control of those internal defense stations, any Predator boarding crew will be quickly found, located and exterminated. Since you were able to duplicate the data and program files which made Spirit and were then able to carry them to safety, we will be able to reload them inside the AI¹ computer core of the NOSTROMO and thus revive Spirit.”

“And I am impatient to be able to do that, Tina. As you know well, I had an intimate link with Spirit, who was basically my mother, if you consider the fact that she designed me and directed my fabrication inside the automated repair and production shops aboard the KOSTROMA. Unfortunately, none of the computer systems to be found on New Haven have the data capacity to allow the downloading of Spirit’s files, and this by a long shot. What we need for that is the kind of AI computer mainframe that the Avalon Space Yards will install in the NOSTROMO.”

“Oh, I promise you that we will do just that in the next few days, my friend. I intend to go visit Mister Shomberg, at the Avalon Space Yards, in the next few days. You will be coming with me, with the portable data modules containing Spirit’s datafiles.” That brought at once a happy grin on Eve’s face.

“I can’t wait for that, Tina. To be able again to communicate with Spirit and to exchange data and ideas with her will be truly a great thing for me.”

“Which brings me to the final subject I wanted to discuss: our ship’s internal security force. As you know, forming a good security officer takes years, not counting the more than twenty years needed for that person to grow up and be educated. Furthermore, to adequately protect from the inside a ship as enormous as the NOSTROMO will be would take many hundreds, if not thousands of extra security officers. The problem is that, even if I could find and hire that kind of numbers of security officers, then paying them properly would basically put my corporation in the red, and quickly! There is no way that I would be able to make a profit, even with a ship as efficient as the NOSTROMO will be, if I have to pay, feed and house a thousand or more

¹ AI : Artificial Intelligence.

security officers. Of course, multiplying the number of fixed internal defense stations inside the NOSTROMO would in the long run prove a lot more practical as a solution but that has a major flaw: they would be FIXED defense stations. Thus, if one or more defense station should be neutralized or destroyed by boarders, then that portion of ship will then become defenseless and vulnerable, along with its Human occupants. The only solution to that is a mobile defense force able to move in quickly to reinforce our internal defenses and, if need be, fight to regain control of parts of our ship taken over by boarders. Such a mobile defense force could be composed of Human security officers...or of combat robots. This is where you come in, Eve.”

“Me? I may have some weapons and force shields implanted inside my android body but I am no combat robot, Tina.”

“True! However, such combat robots could be designed very efficiently by Spirit, once she will be reactivated. If she can design an android as sophisticated as you, then designing robots meant for security and combat should be an easy task for her...and you. While we don't have on New Haven the kind of AI mainframe computer needed to reactivate Spirit, we do have a powerful mainframe computer in the basement of this building that would be good enough to load the datafiles pertinent to the design and production of androids. What I would like you to do is to use that computer, download in it copies of the files on android design you have and then produce a design appropriate for internal security duties aboard the NOSTROMO. I have already thought a bit about that and I will say this to you: I don't want some kind of scary mechanical killer android of the kind of machine that would terrify my future passengers, especially the younger ones. I want androids which will be able to integrate smoothly with the rest of my crew and with my passengers. Ideally, those security androids should also be able to effect emergency battle damage repairs in difficult conditions in which a human repair crew could not operate efficiently. Now, do you think that you could produce such a design, so that we could have it built in series quantities by the Avalon Space Yards, which has a highly developed robotics production line?”

“Yes, I can, Tina!” replied at once Eve. “It may take me over a minute or two to for me to decide on the best design possible but I can already envision many different possibilities.”

“Over a minute or two, she says!” said Tina while rolling her eyes. “Sometimes, I still forget how fast an electronic mind can think, compared to a human mind. Now, here is the truly delicate point about this, Eve. We humans tend to look at robots and

treat them like something similar to the slaves of the past. However, just thinking about that repulses me. The robots we use have a very limited kind of AI programming and capability geared towards a few specific goals and jobs at most, with little or no true personality of their own. In this optic, these robots are actually simple tools. However, when it comes to internal security duties aboard a ship, the androids doing such duty will by necessity have to be able to interact routinely with both passengers and with crew members. They will thus need at least a minimum of interpersonal skills and an individual personality in order to do their job efficiently. In turn, having androids with individual personalities means to me that they will have to be treated with a minimum of respect and regard concerning their work conditions. In this, I would need your frank opinion, Eve, as you are the only AI android I ever worked with. What do you think up to now of your existence, your interactions with us Humans and what makes your existence worthwhile in your opinion? Again, don't be afraid to tell me the hard truth."

Eve nodded slowly her head while smiling to her friend.

"Tina, you just demonstrated again how caring a person you are. I know of very few Humans who would take the time to consider the welfare and, if I can call it that, happiness, of an artificial construct like me. About me, while I can't have true feelings or emotions, I can evaluate and judge the reactions of others to me and I can tell you that you and the other members of your crew who know about my true nature value and respect me. That by itself gives me a high degree of personal confidence and satisfaction. Also, my main incentive to exist is curiosity, the potential to constantly learn and see new things worth putting in my electronic memory. In turn, constantly living new experiences and learning from them help me develop something akin to human basic emotions. For that alone, I consider my existence well worth it."

It was Tina's turn to nod her head in response.

"Thank you! Your answer has just been very helpful to me. Finally, here is a last question for you. Because you have a highly-developed personality and were acting as a hostess on the KOSTROMA, you had an individual cabin, pay and perks similar to those of a Human crewmember. Do you see the same needs for the security androids you will be designing?"

"Even for me, that question of yours involve a near infinity of factors to be evaluated and studied. Could I wait until tomorrow before I answer that question?"

That made Tina chuckle briefly before she answered Eve.

"I don't mind waiting until tomorrow, my friend. If given to a group of Human sociologists, then those sociologists would probably debate that question for days on end and would produce as nearly as many differing opinions as their numbers were."

"Actually, they may just answer your question quickly, by saying that androids don't deserve such considerations about their welfare or state of happiness, not being true living beings."

Eve's reply made Tina sober up in a hurry, as she realized that Eve was right.

"Well, let's say that I am not like the typical sociologist, Eve. I still want to treat my future android employees the same way I treat my Human employees, minus the need to feed them, of course."

To Tina's surprise, Eve then got up from her sofa and came to her, bending over her and kissing her on her forehead before smiling down to her.

"That is why you are my friend, Tina."

09:05 (Earth Universal Time)
Monday, June 11, 2328
Private interstellar yacht FRIENDSHIP
On approach to the Avalon Space Yards
Low Earth Orbit, Solar System



There were three persons in the cockpit of the small private yacht now approaching the huge orbital mass of the Avalon Space Yards, which had a diameter of sixteen kilometers and a height of eight kilometers: Tina, Eve and Doctor Koomak, a member of the Koorivar race who was also a certified genius and one of the top physics specialists of this time. Like all the Koorivars, Koomak was much shorter than a typical Human and stood on strangely-shaped 'Z'-like legs, plus had an elongated cranium perched on top of a long, flexible neck. A pair of long and pointy ears stood up atop his head, while he had five-fingered hands at the ends of his two arms. His skin was smooth and hairless and was of a light brown coloration. Like all Koorivars, Koomak was also what a Human would call a hermaphrodite, a creature with both



male and female sexual organs, something that allowed the Koorivars to mingle sexually and reproduce with any of their likes. Koomak thus had both a penis and a vagina, on top of sporting a pair of prominent breasts. A Human who would see for the first time a Koorivar would probably be amused by his morphology or would even frown at his hermaphrodite nature, but Tina had quickly learned to appreciate the Koorivars as the intelligent, kind and pacifist vegetarian beings they were. In the case of Koomak, his genius had given Humanity and his own race the biggest advance to date in the history of science: a working, practical interstellar propulsion drive, which was now appropriately called the 'Koomak Drive'. Tina highly valued Koomak's scientific expertise and imagination, which could prove very useful on this visit, so she had gone to the planet New Shouria, in which orbit her own New Haven turned, to pick up the old scientist before jumping to Earth's orbit.

Letting the automated flight approach and landing system of the giant space construction yard handle the approach and docking of her small space yacht, Tina swiveled her pilot's chair in order to face both Eve and Koomak.

"Hopefully, the construction phase of my NOSTROMO won't be so advanced that it would turn out to be difficult to add to it the modifications we are going to request to Mister Shomberg. Those modifications will mean a huge difference in any future fight with the Space Predators."

"And stopping those abominations should be everyone's responsibility in this galaxy." said Koomak in a sober tone. "For us Koorivars, who are vegetarians, such carnivorous predators are especially terrifying and loathsome, which is why Governor Sheraz immediately offered to support you in this. You have already done so much for our race and you deserve all the help we can give you, Tina. On my part, I have been thinking about the design problem about disintegrator cannons you presented to me and I think that I will be able to fix it fairly rapidly."

"That would be a great news, Koomak: I really want to improve the effective range of those cannons. While they are very powerful weapons, the original Drazts design suffers from the tendency of its beam to lose its focus with distance, and this to a much greater degree than that of our laser batteries. We can't afford any loss of range when engaging a Space Predator ship, so your help in this will be priceless. Mind you, the material gift Governor Sheraz gave to me in the name of the Koorivars will go a long

way to pay for all the design modifications we are going to ask Gustav Shomberg to do on my NOSTROMO.”

The old physicist smiled at the mention of the cargo of five tons of pure gold ingots carried in the storage bay of the FRIENDSHIP.

“Hey, they say on Earth that we Koorivars have gold coming out of our ears, not to say out of some less clean place. We have to live up to our reputation after all. And you don’t need to worry about the state of our finances, Tina: we have plenty more gold, silver and platinum left in our vaults. Also, your future security androids will prove very useful in providing internal protection against boarders to our own ships.”

“With Koorivar ships flying around Space like our own Human ships, you will need protection against those Space Predators as much as we do. Thankfully, Governor Sheraz saw that need at once when he was told by you about my projects, thus his quick offer of financial support to me. Now we need to see if and how fast we will be able to turn my projects into reality.”

They then stayed mostly silent until their yacht was docked and secured to one of the 120 docking stations for small and medium ships built inside the cavernous visitors’ harbor of the space yards. When they stepped out of the FRIENDSHIP, they were met by a young and beautiful Asian woman, whom Tina knew to be one of Gustav Shomberg’s personal assistants. Tina immediately gave the woman a warm smile.

“Hi, Miri! How are you these days?”

“Busy but happy. The Spacers’ League has requested that we accelerate work as much as possible on the ships they ordered from us, due to this new and horrible threat from those monstrous Space Predators.”

“Uh, I hope that does not mean that work on my NOSTROMO will be delayed.”

“Don’t worry, Commodore Forster: your ship is still at the top of our priority list. After all, the Spacers’ League is financing the weapons systems which are being built for your ship.”

“Talking about weapons systems, I will need to urgently speak with Gustav Shomberg about them: I want some important changes made to them, in order to better fight those Space Predators.”

“Then, I will drive you at best speed to his office, Commodore: my cart is in the hallway, just outside of this safety airlock.”

“Can it carry over five tons?”

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