

Chapter 1: Attack on the Training Base

A training holiday, now that's more like it. He had dropped the weight and was easily in the best shape of his life. He liked the way his gray and black camouflage uniform made him look. The soft patrol cap was easy to maintain, and the material ate up sweat. His regimental insignia declared to everyone where he belonged and what to expect if you crossed him.

The sky here always looked so deep blue, almost purple just after the end of the rainy season on Training World One. This was its code name. Private Denver Smith had no clue where this planet really was. All he knew was that he was not "in Kansas anymore." He hardly noticed the 1.2 g gravity of this world. Given the time of its own accord, it would have turned into an interesting place, but colonization by his employers had changed any future direction this world might have taken.

A slight breeze shook the trees imported from Earth, a little piece of home. No trees or grass had yet evolved native to the training world. In the distance, he saw a company sized unit marching off somewhere. He turned toward what the troops called *the mall*, a place where they could relax, play games, eat something other than mess hall food, or just hang out during down time.

Maybe, no don't stay inside today, he thought to himself. The ridge overlooking the training center was more appealing.

He headed off, up the trail to the ridge. It had been a long road from teaching in a college, then as political prisoner 1553441 to the life of a legionnaire on some far off world. He had never believed in such things, but here he was. None of his old life mattered, and he knew the danger Earth would eventually face. None of it mattered now.

He followed the path through the trees. Soon they would be off on their first mission against a terrible enemy, but he and the rest of the legion were as ready as they could be. He did not dwell on it; only the quiet sound of the wind held his attention.

There was another sound almost gentle at first, then without warning a double sonic boom, followed by another and another. The klaxon alarm sounded. Something was desperately wrong. They had been trained to go to a shelter if it ever went off.

Then, he could see it high above in the distance, black specks in the sky. He did not recognize what the speckswere but instinctively thought of Pearl Harbor. He turned and ran back down the hill only to stop suddenly. Above him on the ridge, the batteries were under attack. Huge explosions rocked the valley and fire shot skyward.

"Oh man." He turned and ran back toward the ridge. *Maybe those guys need help.* Certainly, there would be wounded. Most everything was a smoldering mess. The acrid smell of burning ordinance and burning flesh filled the air. He looked inside the few buildings, no bodies, just fire and smoke.

Farther up the hill, one of the batteries still seemed to be in good condition. It was a small, crew served explosive, rocket, projectile gun; the type they had experimented with briefly, but decided to go with another weapons system instead. The gun was empty. "Blast!"

Back behind him, built into the hill, was a metal door. In front of it, he saw a soldier on the ground, blood on his uniform.

He ran over. The soldier opened his eyes, "Take the keys and get out the ammo."

“Sure, but let me get you inside first.” Quickly unlocking the door and carrying him inside, he laid the injured man down next to the aid station. The steps came

back. *Stop the bleeding, restore breathing, and treat for shock.* He did not remember where he first heard those words, but they came back clear, even as explosions rocked the valley below.

With the soldier in no immediate danger, he grabbed a hand truck, connected one crate of rocket ammo to it, and pushed it outside. Black smoke curled up everywhere. Private Smith felt the concussion from the blasts. He pulled the charging mechanism open and stuck the lead drum in. The rest would be self-loaded. The rounds were rocket powered, and after the gunner selected a target, each round would pursue the target for as long as it could. The shaped charge inside would blast through some pretty strong armor and vaporize the metal jacket; all in all, a formidable weapon.

In the rec center, he played for drinks on the simulator for a gun like this. Now it was armed and charged. He gripped the handles and swung it around. There were no immediate attacks on his position, but he could see the first of the large ground attack craft swing a wide circle and turn back toward the base.

He followed it over his left shoulder and swore. Down low, slow, and big. “Just the way I like ‘em.”

If he only had his helmet, its computer would have ID’ed them, but he could guess. These were landing craft, carrying troops. This was not Pearl Harbor; it was an all-out raid. If they could destroy the legion on the ground, before it went into action, it might be the knockout punch the enemy needed.

She was down there. Had she made it to the underground shelters? Somebody had thought about such an attack, or there would not have been batteries on the ridge.

He put the crosshairs on the ground attack craft only slightly higher than the ridge. When the green square

outlining the craft decreased to the center of the crosshairs, he squeezed the trigger. Instantly he was in a wall of smoke and sound. He had forgotten about earplugs. He would probably be deaf real soon or dead.

They must have thought their first attack on the ridge had wiped everything out. What he took to be troop carriers were sailing just in front of him. It was almost too easy. He targeted the last ship first. It exploded, and debris rained everywhere. He went to the next target and squeezed. It blew apart and apparently damaged the ship next to it, which started to dive toward the ground and roll to the right exploding on impact. Now there were several others within range. He kept firing. That’s four down; five, six, and still they came right into his gun sights.

He heard a loud, painful mechanical scream. One of the attack craft was on him. Man, even these were big. He quickly turned and fired; wreckage rained all around him. He looked over his shoulder and two more were in a wide turn for him. He looked back at the approaching landing craft. He might have time for another shot or two before they started strafing him.

He swung around, and with each squeeze of the trigger, another twenty rockets let fly. Something tingled on the right side of this head. He wiped at it with his left hand, blood. It was warm and sticky. No time to worry. He swung around and acquired the lead attack craft. He squeezed, and it exploded.

He squeezed again, but as he did, the second one juked right, then left, then up and down. *Big and slow but not stupid.* Only one of the rockets was able to find its target. It visibly shuddered, and some pieces flew off then he squeezed again. This time it exploded in the air.

As Denver swung back, someone grabbed his arm. It was a medic. The man said something and shoved a field phone into his hand, but he could not hear.

“I don’t know who you are, but if you can hear me, my eardrums are busted. They have landers coming in from the northeast low. They have changed course and are coming in over the mountains too close for me to get a shot off. They may be attacking from the north now.”

Suddenly the ground exploded around him. An attack craft slid overhead. He turned and fired, and it blew into thousands of pieces. Spinning around he just got a shot off at another lander when, with a bright flash, everything went black. He floated for a while coming to slowly and then the pain. His toes moved, but his left hand would not respond.

“Wha...?” He got to his knees and crawled back to his gun. People were coming up the hill in combat gear. Finally a response, but he could see attack aircraft rolling in on them. He struggled to his feet. With his right hand, he picked up his left arm and placed the hand on the firing mechanism. He coughed blood and limped around.

He could not see. He wiped his eyes. The left would not open; the right fogged. With indescribable sluggishness, he moved the gun into the path of the attack craft and squeezed. The target smoked but stayed on its attack vector. He moved ahead of the target and squeezed. This time it blew up.

He set up the second one the same way, and it too blew to pieces. *They blew off this weapon. I’ll take one of these any day!* He stumbled around. He could see some of the landers. They were on the ground disgorging troops. He fired again, and one burst into flames. He fired at the second, but only three rockets came out. His gun was empty. He struggled to get the ammo container off but had not the strength.

An arm came across his, and he looked into the face of a legionnaire. The newcomer quickly got the empty container disconnected, and he could see him barking orders into his mic. Denver Smith heard none of it. Two other legionnaires lifted him in their arms and sprinted to the shelter of the ammo room as another trooper wheeled out a fresh drum of ammo.

He could see a vehicle roll up, and its gun began firing down on the landers. He was placed on the floor and left there. Slowly he faded off. None of it mattered; he seemed to float over the whole scene.

He awoke in the aid station. The place was filled. Blood and gurneys were everywhere. He thought at first he was in a ward of some kind, but it was a surgery room with several operations going on at once.

Someone came over to him and looked seriously into his eyes. “This one is awake. Can you tell me your name?” He heard none of it.

They put a mask over his face, and he began to float again.

There was general mayhem and smoke everywhere. They were ready for the second wave. The navy got their act together, helped repulse the second wave, and drove off the orbiting ships.

Most of the thirty plus landers had been destroyed on the ground or in the air, largely by one gun up on the ridge. Troops pulled out of the shelters, were armed, and they formed a skirmish line just at the outskirts of the training camp.

The legion had seen its first action and had been bloodied. However, it pulled itself together, and everyone fought as he had been trained. Individual effort and initiative became the order of

the day as the battle firmed up. The Reptilians were quickly overrun. Intel would get a look at some of their technology and tactics.

It would all prove useful in the weeks that follow as the whole thing was studied, war-gamed, and simulated on computers. There would be medals handed out, especially to the man up on the ridge who blunted the attack.

“Is he awake Doc?” asked Denver’s training unit commanding officer.

“He was a moment ago. Just don’t tire him too much.” The doctor glanced back over at Denver and then she left the room.

“Son, can you hear me?”

For the first time in days, he could hear. It sounded funny at first, far off. He tried to speak, but his throat was dry and scratchy.

“Hello, sir.”

The officer smiled. “We were starting to get a little worried about you.”

“Wh... what happened?”

“What happened? Well, we were hit pretty hard. We have 59 confirmed dead and over 300 wounded. It would have been much worse if they had overrun the base. They were trying to wipe out the legion, but they got their noses bloodied badly.”

“We won?”

“We whipped them good, thanks, in large part, to you. You held them off until we could figure out what they were doing and get people up there to stop it.”

“I don’t remember much after some guys got up there.”

“Yeah, they said you were pretty shot up, but the doctor tells me that you will be okay.”

He tried to smile. “That’s good.”

“Well, you rest easy. I need to get back and let my boss know you are all in one piece. Besides, I think a young lady is waiting outside to see you.”

“Thank you, sir.”

He walked out and said something in the hall that Denver could hear but not understand. He heard someone else enter.

“Hi hero,” she said. It was Private First Class Argentina de la Fuentes.