

Prophet and Messiah

Korb the Omniscient

Part six of the saga of *Zool*: Death Planet where the indomitable outcast heroes of 10,000 worlds battle in dark swamps amid the death throes of un-nameable beasts.¹³

Through the airlock stepped a humanoid figure. With almost superhuman self-control Korb avoided shooting it, since it was obviously harmless. The others had less of a problem. From its thigh length leather boots, straps and chains to its bullhide whip and sheep under one arm it exuded the lugubrious air of a used car salesman.

“Hello, my name is Rave, can I interest you gentlemen in some recreational aids?”

“Right up your field,” said Korb to the taller Revenant, Harkonnen, pointing to the sheep.

“Do you think you could manage a dousing in custard followed by a bath in lime jelly with a penguin and that sheep?” leered Harkonnen.

Rave brightened, “Certainly sir, jelly baths are one of my specialities, as are shop-window dummies.”

“Sorry,” said Korb, “That character isn’t here.”

So we must leave the villains doing whatever it is people do during the asterisks. (Yes, this is the famed Asimov cop-out.)

Meanwhile on Zool things were not going well. Outside the temple Doctor Death was discussing his 17 dimensional battle plan with two other post-revenants (those who passed beyond revenanthood and have been reborn with powers beyond the comprehension of ordinary beings), his pate gleaming evilly. One was covered in long red stubble and was garbed solely in blue battle-shorts, the other appeared to have lost his natural hair and had replaced it with spray plastic string. Neither was convinced and Doctor Death was persuading them with a large Kill-O-Zap. Nearby Cutlass was assembling a Thermonuclear Hand Grenade while the hordes of Zool — not wanting their temple razed — tried to stop him. Unfortunately Cutlass was maintaining a continual loud drone causing any who approached to drop senseless.

Inside Jane was despondent. “The situation is hopeless Thur.”

A large android and a small robot materialized. The large android was covered in wet orange paint and was holding a can labelled ‘amber solaire for mechanical men’.

“Have you come to save us?” said Jane, bouncing fetchingly (like all good heroines she was wearing disco dress consisting of two small metal cans and a miniscule piece of semi-transparent cloth draped about her middle).

“I am the self-programming Randroid aspect of the Molin-Cax entity,” proclaimed the android, surreptitiously taking a pill from a bottle labelled ‘eternal youth capsules’. “And this is the battlesheep computer remote known as the Stainless Steel Hamster,” (it bounced when its name was mentioned) “I have come to free you from the anarchist hordes — with this,” he produced a plot device from

¹³See Shackle and Brock, *Fauna and Flora of Zool* (OUP, 2323).

thin air (that region of sub-plot-space where most of them are kept), “a sub-plot-space plotter, or is it a sub-plot-space spacer? I’m not absolutely, objectively, certain.” (Its Rand circuits had momentarily overloaded.) “Anyway, go to it S.S.H.” The small robot scampered over the machine pressing buttons with its extremely fine prehensile nose, and before you could say topologically invariant transformation they were replotted onto the battleship.

“Ulp,” said Korb, wiping off the engine oil.

“Ulp,” said Harkonnen, wiping off the jelly.

“Ulp,” said Von Herpes, brushing off biscuit crumbs and rubber bands.

“At last,” said the Mad Alchemist.

“Restrain them,” said Cax indicating Jane and Thur. Thur raised both eyebrows and Rasputin dived valiantly from her shoulder to defend her: exploding as Korb shot at it with a .75 mega-zap magnum. Smugness and distress struggled to control his features; while he liked shooting things, he wasn’t so keen on killing them. Smugness won. It usually did. Thur picked up the soggy carcass and put it in her bag.

“It is time to tell you of our absolute purpose,” Cax proselytized, turning up the bass on his voicebox. “To release the oppressed heroes of Zool and free them to take short vacations in the more fashionable parts of the galaxy.”

“To rape and pillage,” snarled Gestetner.

“To free them from oppression by the Galactic Government and its military arm the Starsheep Troopers. We must assemble our forces. But first we need a resolute, charismatic and expendable leader.”

“What mug would do that?” sniggered Von Herpes, not noticing the straight backs and glazed expressions of the others.

“Hail Prinz Gestetner Von Herpes,” they chorused.

“But what would make me do that?” he said nervously looking at their clenched fist salutes.

“It is your duty,” boomed Cax with his woofer reverb turned up full.

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” pleaded Gestetner.

“Well actually I haven’t,” said God, materializing (as was his wont) with a thunderclap and straightening his flashing bow-tie (which he kept despite the number of worshippers it lost him), “I just think you should.”

“I’ll do it,” gasped Gestetner hopelessly.

“Then onwards to Fordox to assemble the *Organisation to Unfetter Self-determining beings From Government*,” spoke Cax with a far-sighted look in his optics.

“We’ve had this conversation before,” said Korb.

- Are the characters in a time loop?
- Will God demand the ultimate sacrifice from Prinz Gestetner?
- What are the Starsheep Troopers?

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