

2014 MCC Creative Writing Contest

Fiction Category

Second Place: Excerpt from “*The Kastron Virus*,” by Matthew Meier

The starship, Nightfire, rocketed through space towards hundreds of similar ships. This was the fleet that made up the majority of the Resistance, the rest of their forces were scattered across the universe, hiding on distant planets, asteroid fields, and the most remote systems in the universe. Their numbers did not even come close to those of their enemy, Kyrell’s Teazonian Empire, but they had put everything they had into it, and they were too far into the war to pull out now.

Other than rogue Teazonians, the Resistance was made up of two other alien races. The Enegoids used to be humanoid peace lovers, and were easily recognized because their pitch black skin was made out of solid energy. When aggravated, their ‘skin’ would float off them in the form of visible gaseous energy. Sadly, this species was all but extinct, nearly being wiped out by Kyrell’s empire, leaving Cobline, the Resistance’s ace pilot, the last Enegoid in existence. The other race was known as Reddas. These aliens resembled giant limbed snakes, and were feared by beings all across the galaxy for many reasons. Not only were they emotionless, blood-thirsty killers, but their race was easily angered, and had extremely short tempers. That coupled with their habit of eating any form of living or dead meat made Reddas feared by both friends and foes alike.

On the bridge of the Nightfire, Liten, the leader of the Resistance stood with Barlam, a Teazonian scientist, Cobline, and a large muscular Redda looking at a glowing orange liquid, known as the Kastron Virus, which they had stolen from an enemy research facility, but not without the loss of a few thousand fighters.

“So,” Cobline said, “how is this canister of waste going to help us win the war against Kyrell’s Empire?”

“This isn’t waste!” Barlam snapped as if he had been personally insulted. “I helped to create the Kastron Virus before the war! If everything works out the way we have planned it, then whoever is exposed to this will gain supernatural powers. It’s our only chance at winning the war.”

“Having those kinds of abilities would be a good asset to have,” Cobline muttered, “but does it work?”

The large Redda that stood next to Liten chuckled venomously, causing Cobline to slowly inch away from the being.

“Oh, it works.” he hissed.

“How would you know, Toxic?” Cobline asked.

“Why do you think you call me Toxic?” the Redda asked as it grinned, a sight which reminded Cobline of something straight out of a nightmare. “It certainly isn’t my birth name. The name was given to me by Teazonian Scientists back in the Pramlen Facility...The name sort of stuck.”

“You see,” Barlam explained regretfully, “Once we created the Kastron Virus, we... found...volunteers to test it on.”

“And I had the pleasure to be a ‘volunteer’.” Toxic snarled scornfully.

“We gathered over three hundred subjects, and tested the Kastron Virus on all of them.” Barlam continued as he paced around the room, “It was originally intended to grant the test subjects, and eventually us, infinite knowledge in order to increase our understanding of the universe, but it granted them supernatural abilities instead. The survival ratio was less than ten percent. Due to its failure, we locked it away, hoping to never hear of it again. Those who survived the process used their powers to escape, then Kyrell ordered that they be hunted down and killed, hence his rise to power. Only two were known to survive the massacre, and Toxic has the honor of being one of them. I watched him fight his way through a good hundred or so of the warriors Kyrell sent after him.”

“You said two survived?” Cobline asked. “Then who is the second?”

A ghost-like Teazonian faded through the floor, in front of Cobline, causing him to jump back, startled. Although he had been in Liten’s Resistance for quite some time now, he had never seen a being like this before. This Teazonian looked like every other one Cobline had seen, but this one, was missing half of his bottom left horn, his skin was ghost white and semi-transparent, instead of mud-brown like all the others, and, even more strangely, he hovered above the ground, calmly eying the others.

“I’m the other one.” the being muttered.

Barlam nodded in the newcomer’s direction.

“This is Treert.” Barlam said, “He was also the first one to be exposed to the Kastron Virus, and develop powers. This was his result.”

Cobline extended his hand as if to touch Treert, but his hand just faded through his ghostly body.

“My ability is more of a curse than a blessing.” Treert said. “Teazonians are naturally immortal, but now, the Kastron Virus has me stuck in this intangible form for the rest of eternity.”

“So...you can't die?” Cobline asked.

“Exactly.” Treert said, his voice gradually rising in anger. “I can no longer touch anything, fight, take revenge on the Empire for slaughtering my family...I can only float around, existing as a barely visible spirit, fresh from the gates of hell!”

Cobline turned to Toxic, leaving Treert to rant on about his ‘gift’ of eternal life.

“So what can you do?”

Toxic didn't respond. He just simply spat on the ground, narrowly missing Cobline's foot. The instant his saliva hit the ground, it began to eat away at the metal floor until a large chunk of it vanished.

“That's my power.” Toxic said, looking at his ally's dumbfound expression, “Acid generation.”

“What are we waiting for?” Cobline exclaimed after a few seconds, “With this we can definitely win the war! What's the plan guys?”

“The plan,” Liten said as he scratched the base of one of the four horns that stuck out of the sides of his head, “is that we hide the Virus on a remote planet.”

“And what if life forms find it and turn out like me?” Treert asked as he hovered above his comrades.

“That's a risk we have to take.” Liten sighed. “I'm sick of Kyrell destroying the galaxy, planet by planet. It is time for us to put a stop to this.”

Suddenly, the bridge of the Nightfire shook heavily. Barlam glanced out the ship's window, seeing several enemy warships.

“Liten,” he croaked in fear, “They're here.”

“We're hiding in a never ending cosmos, and they can still find us.” Liten grumbled. “Barlam, mobilize the fleet, and activate your wormhole device! We need to get out of here before things get ugly.”

Treert glanced out a window in time to see a Reddonian warship explode. Rather than point it out, he kept his mouth shut, not wanting to add to the tension.

“The signals out. Activating wormhole.” Barlam said as a large, swirling vortex opened in front of the Nightfire.

“Send us through.” Liten barked as he watched several smaller ships flee through the wormhole.

The engines of the Nightfire roared as Cobline quickly guided the ship through the tear in space, leading his friends away from the Empire, and to temporary safety. As the fleet escaped, Barlam sat back and sighed in relief.

“My technology is the only thing keeping us alive. Too bad the device needs time to recharge.” Barlam said. “We can’t escape through there again if we get caught.”

Liten frowned. They had no way to successfully flee from their enemy, and that left them with only so many options. Fighting was certainly out of the choice. Any previous attempt to attack the Empire had only resulted in the loss of lives.

“We’ll have to find a habitable planet. Maybe the native species can help us against Kyrell’s forces.”

“Because everyone listens random beings that come down from the sky.” Barlam said sarcastically.

“If we do that,” Treert said grimly, “maybe the Empire will wipe out another race.”

“It’s not like we have many options.” Toxic hissed. “We’re basically a still target the instant we emerge from this wormhole. Treert, you’ve been like kin to me since we met, but you need to stop worrying about every life form in existence. Some beings will die, this is a war!”

“I hate to admit it, but he’s right.” Cobline said thinking about his nearly extinct race, “Barlam, where’s the closest planet?”

Barlam moved towards a corner, and began to toy with a piece of technology. After hitting a few buttons and switches, a hologram of a planet lit up the room.

“This is the closest planet.” he said. “We’ll be able to see it when we exit the wormhole... and it’s capable of supporting life.”

“It looks kind of small.” Liten said. “What planet is that?”

Barlam shrugged. “It doesn’t appear on any official records. Yet, I punch in the conditions of a planet capable of sustaining life, and the scanners pick it up.”

“I wonder what its inhabitants look like.” Cobline wondered aloud.

Barlam hit a few more switches, and a hologram of a human appeared beside the planet. Toxic’s eyes widened at the sight.

“I know that race.” he said.

“What are they?” Treert asked, not liking the way his friend was eyeing the hologram.

“I don’t know what they call themselves,” Toxic said, “but Reddonian scripture refer to them as them as ‘Jafuo’.”

“Meat?” Barlam translated in a frightened whisper.

“Yesssssss.” Toxic hissed happily. “We used to breed these beings back on Reddon for their sweet...tender meat.”

Noticing Toxic was beginning to drool, Barlam took a few steps away from his comrade, watching his acidic saliva begin to dissolve the metallic floor beneath him.

“We want this race as allies to help us beat Kyrell’s forces.” Liten said, “Not for your next meal.”

“Very well.” Toxic said, sounding slightly disappointed, “My people will stick with eating Teazonian soldiers, although their meat isn’t as tender, and the horns taste slightly sour.”

“You know Liten and I are of that race.” Barlam shuddered as Toxic said this, thankful the Reddas were helping Liten’s cause, but nevertheless, terrified of their eating habits.

As the ship flew out of the wormhole, Liten looked out a window at the eternal void of space. Yet, even in that void, he knew that Kyrell’s Empire would find them if they stayed out in the open. Cobline began to guide the ship towards the planet, but jumped as the shuttle to the right of the Nightfire erupted in a ball of flames.

“Already?” Treert snapped as he spotted two Imperial Warships rushing to intercept the fleet, “We just got away from them!”

“Everyone scatter!” Liten barked to the fleet, “We can rendezvous later! Cobline, get us out of here!”

The remaining ships in the resistance’s fleet sped off at top speed across the cosmos with two Empire warships hot on their tail. Most of the ships successfully vanished amongst the stars, but the Nightfire, and five other ships raced towards the planet the ship’s scanners had detected.

“That planet is just ahead.” Barlam said as a blast from one of the enemy warships shook the Nightfire.

“Are you crazy?!” Treert snapped as Cobline gunned the engines, “With two warships shooting at us? That could mean extinction for the race that calls that planet home!”

“Assuming we can hide a few of our numbers on the plant, we might be able to plot our next move.” Liten said as the ship began to enter the planet’s surface. “We just need to get out of this alive!”

“What if those starships pick up the planet’s natives?” Treert snapped, “They’ll be wiped out like millions of others! Have you not thought this through?”

“They’ll join us.” Liten said, wincing as another ship above Nightfire exploded, its charred remains scraping the Nightfire’s hull. “As long as we can keep the Virus out of Kyrell’s reach, then our cause survives! We must be willing to give everything we have, and fight until the very end for what we believe. We will end this war that has purged countless planets and restore peace to the universe.”

JUDGE’S COMMENTS

This is particularly fun because the writer created a whole history/backdrop for the present situation. The characters glower and posture as they should in sci fi and we are provided some slick technological methodology. (There is a bit of a technical problem—can an intangible form spit? and won’t that spit continue eating away all the metal?) The satire on human life forms at the end is very entertaining.

Jim Fatka served as judge for the 2014 contest. Mr. Fatka is a recently retired MCC English instructor who taught numerous writing and literature courses, including creative writing.