

Battle for Dinosaur Planet

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The Gateway

Captain James Bowman sat in the command chair at the center of the Phoenix's bridge. He spoke into a small audio recorder in his left hand.

"Command log, November 24, 2428. We're in orbit around Antos, the fourth planet in the Morna system. Our research and scientific teams on the planet's surface have finally completed their work, and as such we are making final preparations to test the Manani gateway. Two preliminary tests have already been run, using unmanned probes, and both have been a complete success, so we are now preparing the Phoenix for an attempt. If this experiment is a success, we will have redefined interstellar travel as we know it."

The Phoenix's communications officer, an attractive, young lieutenant named Ashley Martinez, adjusted her headset, then glanced over at James. "Captain," she said, "all preliminary checks have been completed on the surface. They're about to activate the gateway."

"On screen," James said.

An image formed on the screen at the front of the Phoenix's bridge. It was the planet Antos, as seen from their perspective in orbit. The lush, tropical planet appeared absolutely normal at first, but a few seconds later, an enormous beam of light shot from its surface. James had to blink his eyes to help them get used to the beam's brightness. The minute the beam reached orbit, it coalesced and formed into a massive, spinning, circular gateway that, in many ways, reminded James of some type of interstellar whirlpool.

"Do we have full formation?" he asked.

The Helix's science officer, Lieutenant S'ondra Ala Ola, answered his question from her work station at the back of the bridge. "We do," she said. "Everything checks out, with readings exactly the same as the first two attempts. And we've got a green light from the surface."

James turned to his chief navigations officer, a lieutenant named Curt Williams, who sat at his work station at the front of the bridge, just a few meters away from the view screen. Williams was an athletic man with dark skin, brown eyes, and a shaved head.

"Take us in, Mr. Williams," James said.

A second later, the Phoenix's massive engines sprang to life, and the Alliance battleship moved forward, heading directly toward the center of the spinning gateway.

"Three seconds to entry," Curt said. "Two, one."

The journey through the gateway was an experience like none James had ever experienced. It was like traveling through a long, spiraling, psychedelic tunnel, one that wound its way first to the left, then to the right, then up, then back down. At one point, it made him dizzy and a bit disoriented, but the sensation did not last for long. Within a couple of seconds, it was over, and the Phoenix had once again returned to normal space, and it was now in orbit above a large, rocky, red planet.

"Report," James said. "Location?"

"We're in the Gorlandu system," Curt responded, reading the printouts on the console in front of him. "We're in orbit around the third planet, Odava."

James smiled. He could hardly believe it. With the use of the Manani gateway, the Phoenix had traveled, almost instantaneously, from one side of the galaxy to the other.

But their experiment was not yet complete. They still had to make certain they could get back safely.

“Is the gateway still open?” James asked.

Curt nodded.

“Take us in.”

Less than five seconds later, they were back in the Morna system, once again in orbit around Antos.

“Send word to the surface,” James said. “The experiment was a complete success, in every way. The Manani pyramids, and their gateways, are the discovery of a lifetime.”

The Devite

Archbishop Falleen stood on a dais at the front of a large congregation, in a temple on his home planet of Devite Prime. He held a book in one hand and a staff in the other.

“Blessed are the Devite,” he said. “And all who follow them.”

Archbishop Falleen was a Devite, the major race indigenous to the planet Devite Prime. Like most Devite, Archbishop Falleen was humanoid in appearance, with deep, black skin and a matching pair of cranial horns, one growing from each side of his forehead, just above the corners of his eyes. He wore a long, flowing robe that covered the majority of his body but had a slit in the back that allowed his long, forked tail to wave freely from side to side.

“Blessed are the Devite,” the congregation chanted, repeating his words.

“It is easy to stray from the path of righteousness,” Archbishop Falleen said, “so one must always be wary. Temptation and wickedness await us around every corner.”

He was about to continue his sermon when another Devite entered the room and rushed immediately to his side. It was one of Archbishop Falleen’s highest ranking aides, Priestess Anahira. Unlike Archbishop Falleen, who had deep, ebony skin, Priestess Anahira’s skin was crimson.

“I need to speak to you,” Priestess Anahira said. There was a look of great excitement, and extreme urgency, in her eyes.

“I assume this is of great importance,” Archbishop Falleen said. “As you know, Priestess, interrupting prostration is sacrilege.”

“I assure you, your eminence,” Priestess Anahira said with a slight bow. “It is.”

Archbishop Falleen nodded, then turned briefly to his congregation. “I apologize for the interruption. I will only be a minute.”

At that, he turned and followed Priestess Anahira into a nearby hallway. Priestess Anahira was so excited she could hardly wait to make her report.

“Our reports have finally been confirmed,” she said. “The Alliance experiment on Antos was a success.”

Archbishop Falleen’s eyes grew large. “So it is true?” he asked. “The Manani gateway is fully operational?”

Priestess Anahira nodded. “And it’s everything we hoped for, your eminence. Instantaneous travel to the furthest reaches of the galaxy. With it, we will finally have the means to spread our beliefs throughout the cosmos. The number of followers we will amass will be boundless.”

Archbishop Falleen’s heart raced. The Devite were a highly spiritual race, and the one thing they cherished above all others was their religion. Massive temples had been built in every city on Devite Prime to pay homage to their many gods and goddesses, and large churches could be found in every neighborhood. Every aspect of Devite life was affected by their religion, and their government was little more than a puppet controlled by the church. The Devite religion itself, like most religions, was complicated, with many tenets and beliefs, but the most important was the Tenet of Continuance, which espoused the belief that the only way evil could be defeated was if the Devite themselves defeated it, and the only way the Devite could defeat it was if they converted enough people to their religion so as to overwhelm evil by sheer might itself.

As such, over the eons, the Devite had sent many missionaries into space, and they had spent the past five hundred years converting as many people as possible, but their efforts had been slow and only partially successful. They had met many races with their own belief systems, each more absurd than the last. But the greatest problem the Devite had faced had nothing to do with competing religions at all. Their greatest problem was strictly logistic — Devite Prime sat on the edge of the galaxy, far from the most densely populated solar systems. As such, travel to other planets, and to their peoples, had been almost as difficult as the conversion process itself.

But that was all about to change forever. Recently, there had been a discovery in the Antos system of a means of travel that would allow the Devite to spread their beliefs easily and quickly throughout the heavens.

“We must gain control of the Manani pyramid immediately,” Archbishop Falleen said.

“It will not be easy,” Priestess Anahira said. “The humans have a battleship in the system, the Phoenix, commanded by a man named James Bowman. He realizes the value of the gateway, too, and he will not surrender it without a fight.”

Archbishop Falleen grimaced. He had dealt with humans on numerous occasions in the past, and he had never liked them. They were an arrogant, hypocritical, pagan race from the third planet in the Sol system. Although they were one of the galaxies younger races, their power and influence was undeniable.

“Blessed are the Devite,” Archbishop Falleen said. “Damned are those who oppose them. Ready my ship for immediate departure. If Captain Bowman and the humans resist, they shall be destroyed. Claiming control of the gateway is the will of the Devite.”

“As you wish, your eminence,” Priestess Anahira said. She spun on her heel, turned, and rushed away.

With a smile, Archbishop Falleen returned to his congregation and continued his sermon. As the two Devite departed ways, neither of them noticed a tall, hooded man, who had originally been part of Archbishop Falleen’s congregation, but had arisen and followed them stealthily into the hallway. The man stood in the shadows near a small archway, still within earshot, but just out of sight. His name was Michael Cruise, and he was an operative in the Alliance’s top secret intelligence agency. He was actually a human, but he was disguised as a Devite peasant and, as such, was virtually indistinguishable. As soon as the conversation between Archbishop Falleen and Priestess Anahira concluded, he pulled a small, metallic case from under his robes. The case held a high-tech, deep-space communicator, and he removed and activated it.

A second later, he had sent a warning to the Morna system.

Trouble was on its way.