

Aquitain - The War of Possession

An epic battle of planetary scale.

Michael Tagge

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This book is dedicated to my wonderful wife, without whom, I would never have reached a position in life which allowed me to write.

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Chapter I

Heat shimmers off the pale gray plasticrete parade deck as the mid afternoon sun beats down on the assembled recruit battalion. Four platoons of 42 men each, bodies locked into the position of parade rest, sweating profusely as they await further orders. The battalion's Drill Instructors are standing in a group away from the recruits, talking quietly to each other. Their conversation is occasionally punctuated by laughter.

As time passes, the recruit's desert camo utilities grow dark where perspiration soaks through. Knowing this is a test, part of the game that basic has become, Eliot Doeze stands still and tries to concentrate on something besides his discomfort. He knows that the drill instructors are reinforcing lessons of the past weeks about discipline and obedience. He also knows that soon, one of the DIs will find one of them guilty of some trespass, real or imagined and all will be punished by way of some strenuous and probably uncomfortable physical exercise. Pushed to the brink of exhaustion, this will help condition them physically and toughen them mentally. Eliot had realized a few days before that the stamina of all the recruits has been greatly elevated by this regimen. While he still finds it uncomfortable, knowing the purpose of the seemingly mindless persecution has now made it tolerable.

As predicted, the DI's turn as one and march up to their respective platoons. Their DI, a stocky medium tall staff sergeant named Vince Mandel looks at his platoon and shouts,

"Ok you maggots, since you can't hold still we're going to go play in the sand. How does that sound?" Not waiting for an answer he bellows, "Platoon, atten'hut, left hace. Fo'wad har."

After eight weeks in basic training, the troops have reached a high level of proficiency in the art of marching as a unit. The platoon

faces to the left and everyone steps off on his left foot. With the drill instructor calling cadence, they march in unison off the parade deck and over to a space between two plasticrete squad bays where the ground is covered in sand.

After stopping his platoon in the center of the space Mandel looks at his troop and says in an almost pleasant voice, "You know ladies, if I didn't know better; I might think you were showing signs of becoming marines. Hell, it's been almost four days since we've been to the beach." His voice hardens and he shouts, "OK you worthless worms on your backs. Do it now. Go, Go, Go"

In short order the platoon is on its' back crowded together in the sand between the two buildings. Mandel looks at them with satisfaction. "So here we are at the beach having a good time, catching rays, watching the girls go by. Isn't this fun?" He makes a show of looking up at the sky. "Uh oh, I think it's gonna rain? Don't you think it's gonna rain?" After waiting about half a second for a reply Mandel roars "Well you turds, is it gonna rain?"

The sweaty platoon responds as one "Sir, Yes Sir." Smiling in apparent satisfaction, Mandel says "Well good, I'm glad we're in agreement." Raising his voice again, he screams "Now make it rain you little piggies. Make it rain."

Instantly, every recruit in the platoon reaches down and grabs sand in both hands flinging it straight up into the air. The natural consequence of this action is to fill the air immediately above them with sand, which promptly obeys the laws of gravity, falling and covering the whole platoon with wet, gritty particles.

After letting them fling sand in the air till everyone in the platoon is covered in the stuff and extremely uncomfortable the Drill Instructor shouts "OK girls, on your feet." The platoon climbs to its' feet. No one makes any effort to wipe the sand off of his person. They've been down this road enough times to know that such an action will bring instant, painful and lasting retribution. When the platoon makes no effort to wipe away any sand, Malone smiles a

friendly smile and says “Yes ladies, some of you might just turn out to be marines when this is all over.” “OK pukes, that’s about it for today. Who’s got fire watch tonight?” Three recruits hold up a hand. “If I catch you sleeping on duty I’ll have you in the brig for a month. You men go get some sleep. Tomorrow’s a long day. Atten-hut. Dismissed.”

Chapter II

As the platoon files into the squad bay, one of the recruits, Myron Layne says, "I'm getting real tired of this mindless crap they keep putting us through. I signed up to be a marine and fight the Macoute not be the personal whipping post of one Staff Sergeant Mandel."

"They do it to make us stronger." Eliot replies, pulling off his camos.

Looking at Eliot's massive physique, Myron replies, "That may be well and good for someone of your iron constitution and dim wit but for those of us who are more discriminating and less hardy it is a royal pain."

"Bitch, bitch, bitch. Let's get clean and get some sleep. It's going to be tomorrow before tonight's over."

Myron grins at his friend and says, "Ain't that the truth, brother, my man."

While brushing their teeth after showering, a recruit pokes his head into the latrine and spotting Eliot says, "Hey Dozer, the DI wants you front and center ASAP."

"Thanks Billy Boy. I'm on my way."

Wondering what he's done wrong, Eliot considers whether he should dress before he presents himself and decides ASAP means come as you are. So grabbing the towel he has fastened around his waste and slipping his feet into his shower sandals he says, "Moron, I mean Myron, take care of my shaving kit for me, will you?" and hurries from the room.

In less than 30 seconds he has crossed the narrow lane that separates the squad bay from the drill instructors quarters. Stopping before the closed door, he reaches out and knocks firmly on the door.

Speaking in a loud clear voice he says, "Sir, Private Eliot Doeze reporting as ordered. Sir."

Expecting to stand outside the door for an indeterminate time, as is usually the case, Eliot is surprised when Mandel calls "Enter." right away.

Eliot enters and stops one pace in front of the DI's desk. Popping to a position of rigid attention he says, "Sir, private Doeze reporting as ordered sir."

Mandel looks at Doeze and says, "Private, go cover your ugly ass and report back to me at least looking like a Marine."

"Sir, yes sir." Doeze an about face and rushes from the Drill Instructor's quarters.

"He's a stout son of a bitch, isn't he?" the words come from a slender man wearing the uniform of a colonel in the Aquitaine Special Forces. He is sitting in the shadows on the edge of Mandel's bunk.

"You should see his test scores sir." Mandel replies with genuine admiration in his voice. "Pound for pound, he's the strongest, quickest and toughest guy to come through here in a lot of years."

"What's he got between the ears?"

"Everything you need, sir. He'd rather work alone but if you put him in with others he just naturally assumes command. The other recruits don't question his authority; they just do what he tells em. He's careful without being too conservative and he thinks just as well outside the box as in. He is going to be one hell of a soldier sir."

"With the Macoute coming we're going to need hundreds of thousands just like him."

Staff Sergeant Mandel looks at the colonel and asks, "Colonel Snell sir, how does it look?"

"Not good. If we hang on to this planet, it's going to be a close run thing."

“Won’t the Federation help sir?”

“We are not part of the United Federation of Planets, Mandel. They are going to let us handle this ourselves. If we get overrun it will be an object lesson to the other non-member planets that being part of the Federation is a good thing.”

The sergeant asks, “How soon will the Macoute be here, sir?”

“Our present intelligence says we can expect to have an invasion force orbiting the planet in about six months.”

A knock on the door heralds the return of Private Doeze. Before the private can begin the ritual of asking for admittance, Mandel hollers. “Enter private.”

The door swings open and Doeze once again positions himself in front of the DI’s desk at the position of attention. The colonel examines him from the shadows for a moment. He likes what he sees, a tall, extremely well-muscled young man with medium brown hair and intelligent, ice blue eyes.

The colonel says, “At ease private.” and is surprised and impressed when the recruit doesn’t move a muscle. Intelligent and disciplined he thinks.

Mandel smiles a wicked grin and speaks, “Private Doeze, when a colonel tells you to stand at ease that usually means that it’s OK.”

“Sir, yes sir.” Eliot responds and moves to the position of parade rest, a position that is a compromise between attention and at ease.

Snell gets up from Mandel’s bunk, walks to the recruit’s side and speaks, “Private, my name is Snell. We’re about to have a rather unusual discussion for someone in your position. Sergeant Mandel tells me that you’re going to be one hell of a marine. I’m trusting his judgment. If you are going to be one hell of a marine, you have probably already realized that, in the service, unusual problems require unusual solutions. Part of the solution to my unusual problem requires that I speak to a recruit not yet out of boot camp

about things he has no business knowing. I have to take it on faith that the recruit will neither divulge the subject of our conversation to anyone else, ever and that he not let the fact that we had this conversation have a deleterious effect on his ego and a subsequently negative effect on the rest of his training. Do you follow me recruit Doeze?”

“Sir, Yes sir.”

“Do you really?”

Realizing that more is required, Doeze looks at the colonel and says quietly, “Yes sir, I understand.”

Seeing the comprehension in his eyes, the colonel nods slightly and says, “OK son, have a seat.”

Eliot sits on a utilitarian straight back chair pushed under a small round table in the corner of the DI’s quarters. The colonel continues, “Tell me why you joined the Marines, Eliot.”

The answer comes without any hesitation. “Because I believe that we are going to be invaded by the Macoute and that the Federation is not going to do anything about it.”

“Well over half of the people on this planet are sure that the Federation will step in and save us at the last second. What makes you so sure that they won’t.”

“Sir, I’m not willing to gamble the lives of over three billion people on the good intentions of an organization so vast that it can’t adequately take care of its own people. Unless they weaken their own defenses, they have neither the resources nor enough support from their constituency to properly defend a single planet that has refused to join their ranks on several occasions. I just don’t see that happening. Sir.”

“You seem pretty sure of your opinion.”

“Yes sir.”

The colonel contemplates Eliot for a few moments.

“What do you know about the Macoute?”

“Not much, sir. They are an old, old race from a galaxy about 1,550 light years away. They are said to be physically imposing, and intelligent. Their technology is slightly in advance of our own. That they prefer to conquer and take what they want rather than trade peacefully. That’s about it, sir.”

With keen interest, Snell asks, “And where did you get this information?”

“My father, sir.”

“And where did he get it?”

“He pieced it together from things he’s read or heard from men he trusts. Is something wrong, sir?”

“No private. It’s just that your father’s assessment of the Macoute is quite accurate. Considering all of the rumors and wild tales going around, it is remarkably accurate.” Changing the subject, Colonel Snell continues, “What we’re about to discuss comes under the heading of top secret. If I find that you have divulged any of this information to anyone, even unintentionally, I will have you terminated. Do you understand?”

“Yes sir, I understand.”

Walking over to stand in front of the recruit, the colonel leans over just slightly and says, “You understand what, Private Doeze?”

Looking the colonel in the eye, Doeze replies, “That if I divulge any of the conversation we are about to have to anyone, I will be killed.”

The colonel stares back at the recruit for several seconds, nods solemnly and begins speaking in a low, clear voice. “In about six months, give or take a week or two, Macoute ships will be orbiting our planet. It will be an invasion force.”

Pausing, the colonel walks to the other side of the table and sits in the other chair. “Your father was correct when he told you the Macoute don’t trade. They take what they want. By force. And when they are through with a place they destroy it and move on.

We are in the unenviable position of being the next planet in their path. Many of our people can’t believe that the Federation would let us fall to the Macoute. They believe absolutely that the Federation will send help. They’re wrong. Our intelligence sources within the Federation sent word that the Federation is going to let us go it alone and use the time it takes to gut our planet to strengthen their defenses.

That means that we sink or swim on our own. Frankly it doesn’t look good. Any questions so far?”

Eliot shakes his head no.

“I’m going to ask you a few questions. How much further this conversation goes depends on your answers. Still no questions?”

Again a shake of the head.

“Ok. First question; Would you be willing to volunteer for training with a high level of difficulty and a fifty percent chance that not only will you not be able to hack the course but that you might be seriously injured before completion? Second question; would you be willing to enlist for the duration of the conflict with the Macoute? To stay in the service until the Macoute have either been prevented from taking our planet or having taken it, we take it back. Third question; would you be willing to put yourself in harms way for long periods of time with no breaks and in situations where you would probably, almost definitely be working alone?”

After several long seconds, Eliot asks, “Sir now I have a couple of questions?”

“I may not be able to answer them but you can ask.”

“What percentage of military casualties are expected in this confrontation with the Macoute?”

The colonel’s response is immediate, “I can’t answer that.”

“What about civilian casualties?”

The colonel responds, “I can’t answer that one either.”

“Is there a plan to safe guard our gene pool and way of life?”

“Private, I can’t ...”

Before he finish speaking Doeze cuts him off, “Colonel let’s get something straight. Right now you and whomever you work for are desperate for people you can train in a commando type role. That means people smart enough to think for themselves and dedicated enough to see the mission through. You are almost certainly going to ask them to stay behind if the Macoute force the military off planet.

Now I don’t know about the rest of them but if you expect me to sign up for a mission with little or no hope of survival I’m going to need to know that even if we don’t succeed, my people won’t vanish from the universe.

Sir if you can’t or won’t answer these three questions then I think it would be best if I returned to the squad bay and forgot all about meeting you.”

Staff Sergeant Mandel is shocked at what he considers Doeze’s insubordination. However, when he opens his mouth to put the recruit in his place, Colonel Snell raises his hand to silence him. After contemplating the situation for several moments he says, “All right Private Doeze, I’ll answer your questions. First, we are expecting about 50 percent military casualties if we fail to contain the Macoute and are forced to abandon the planet. That figure goes in excess of 73 percent if we are successful in turning them back. Second, the civilian situation is worse. We expect 65 percent civilian casualties if we are successful in turning them back. If we fail to

stop them and the Macoute remain on planet till they decide to leave on their own, civilian casualties may run as high as 97 percent. With the destruction of the planets infrastructure and resources it is doubtful that the survivors will last two years. In essence, our people would cease to exist as a culture. Third, measures have already been taken to insure that our gene pool and way of life will be preserved. If the Macoute are 100 percent successful in their conquest of our planet, enough resources have been safeguarded to reestablish our culture somewhere else. That will be small comfort however, for those billions who die here. Now private, are you satisfied with your answers?"

"Yes sir."

"And now would you do me the kindness of answering my questions?"

"Yes sir."

"Thank you private." Something subtle in the colonel's tone causes Doeze to blush and shift uncomfortably. Pressing his advantage the colonel asks, "Now about my questions. The first one was would you ..."

Eliot interrupts and says, "I'm in for the course colonel. You tell me what you want and I'll do my best to give it to you."

Turning to Sergeant Mandel the colonel says, "In about two days you'll get Temporary Duty Orders for the private here. When he finishes with boot camp send him along with those orders to the SurTac school at Camp Kinder. Keep it quiet."

Speaking to Doeze he says, "Under normal circumstances the Surface Tactical School only accepts candidates with a minimum of 8 years in a regular combat unit. Over 40 percent of the candidates have actual combat experience. I have not made any friends getting raw recruits accepted there. Try not to make me look bad. OK?"

"Yes sir."

“As far as your fellow recruits are concerned, you are going to language school to be a Macoute interpreter. Got it?”

“Yes sir.”

“You are dismissed private.”

Standing and coming to attention, Eliot says, “Sir, yes sir.” He then does an about face and leaves.

Sergeant Mandel opens a desk drawer and removes a bottle and two small jars. He looks a question at the colonel who nods yes. Pouring about an inch into each jar Mandel gets up, walks to the colonel and hands him one. Walking to the other side of the table he sits. Holding up his jar he says, “Semper Fi, colonel.”

The colonel inclines his jar at the DI and replies “Semper Fi, Staff Sergeant.” and takes a drink

Mandel asks a question. “Do you think he’ll work out colonel.”

“Yes, I do.”

“Then how come you don’t look pleased, sir?”

“Because I know that I’m recruiting young men out of the top 1 per cent of our population for duty that most of them won’t live through.” After finishing his drink he stands and shaking Mandel’s hand says, “Thanks for calling him to my attention, Vince. If you find anyone else, let me know.”

“Colonel, how about my request for reassignment to the Surface Tactical unit?”

Looking into the sergeant’s eyes, the colonel replies, “I need you here right now. When the Macoute get close I’ll send for you. Stay in shape.”

Popping to attention, Mandel barks, “Sir, yes sir.”

Grinning at him, the colonel says, “I’ll see you later.” Still smiling he turns and walks out into the night.

Chapter III

The squad bay is dark and everyone is asleep when Eliot returns. He undresses quietly and climbs into his rack in the dark. He spends more than a few minutes thinking about what he has committed himself to before sleep overtakes him.

It is still dark outside at 05:00 hrs when the lights come on and the Staff Sergeant Mandel comes into the squad bay shouting, "All right ladies, time to get up. Get your wormy asses out of the rack and get ready for chow. I want everyone on the company street in five. Move it people." As he speaks he kicks over two large metal trash cans which ring repeatedly as they bounce around on the deck.

By the time he has finished speaking and left the squad bay the recruits are already half dressed and within the appointed five minutes all of the recruits have dressed, made up their racks and are assembled in formation on the company street just outside of the squad bay. No sunshine passes through the steel gray overcast sky, giving the morning a dreary feeling. It had rained sometime during the night and the company street is still wet.

Standing in front of the formation grinning benevolently, Mandel says, "Well don't we look spiffy this morning; all dressed up in our camo fatigues." As he continues to speak the DI walks up and down slowly in front of the ranks. "Do you pretties know what today is?" After a moments silence Mandel's face contorts into a look of rage and he screams, "I asked a question. Do you know what today is?"

Immediately comes the response, shouted from 42 throats. "Sir, No sir."

Magically the smile is back on his face. "Today privates, is your lucky day. You see, to my absolute dismay, the Recruit Battalion Commander told me that you cupcakes are going to begin weapons

training. I told him there was no way you were ready to handle real weapons but he said if we don't issue 'em to somebody the government will take 'em away." A thoughtful look crosses his face and he continues, "Maybe it's my lucky day too. Yeah, maybe a couple of you worthless turds will off yourselves. Yeah, what a nice thought." Looking at his platoon he raises his voice, "Ok people, we're going to the mess hall. I want a precise military formation in front of the mess hall fifteen minutes after you get in the chow line. Do you read me."

Immediately the 42 respond, "Sir, yes sir."

"Okay. Platoon Atten'hut Left Hace. Fowad Har."

Counting cadence the DI marches them off towards the mess hall.

As they stand in line at the mess hall waiting to get their chow Myron asks, "Hey Dozer what did Mandel want last night?"

Without looking at his friend Doeze replies, "He chewed on me about the last inspection."

Myron is silent for a few seconds and then says, "Well if I didn't hear it myself I wouldn't believe it. I finally found something you aren't good at. Boy, you just don't know how to lie do you? Now my curiosity is aroused. What happened last night, good buddy?" There is special emphasis on the last two words.

Doeze looks his friend in the eye and very seriously says, "I can't tell you. If you're my friend you won't ask again and you'll tell anyone else who gets curious that the DI was pissed about how I looked during last inspection. OK?"

"Sure Dozer. Whatever you say man." Sensing this is something important he squelches his curiosity and changes the subject. "What do you think about finally getting to weapons training?"

Relieved, Eliot says, "I think it's about time."

"Oh yeah. I can't wait to get my hands on the Rifle, Combat, 10 mm, armor piercing."

Eliot laughs and says, “Just be sure you don’t shoot yourself or even worse, me, with it.”

“Now would I do that to the guy who literally dragged me around the obstacle course on qualification day?”

“You better not. Let’s choke this mess down and get into formation before Mandel has a chicken.”

The platoon is standing in a precise military formation outside the mess hall fourteen minutes after entering the chow line. When Mandel strides up to the formation and looks them over, there is none of the usual contempt showing on his face. The words he speaks surprises and impresses them.

“All right Marines, listen up.” Mandel has never addressed them as marines before, but discipline prevails and other than the stiffening of a few spines, the recruits do not react to, what is for them, the ultimate compliment.

Mandel continues, “We begin weapons training today. In a little while we’re going over to the armory and draw weapons. After a couple of days of familiarization training, we’ll commandeer a couple of cattle cars, ride out to the range and learn how to hit what we’re aiming at. After two weeks at the range we’ll shoot for qualification. I don’t expect all of you to qualify Expert, but I do expect you all to qualify.”

Mandel looks as if he is about to say something else, then doesn’t. After a moment he changes his mind again and says, “I’ve been turning maggots into Marines for two and a half years now and I’m gonna tell you guys something that I never told any of the others.”

A short pause and he continues, “You all know what’s coming our way and yet you all volunteered to be here. I just wanted to say I’m proud of you and proud to be the guy who taught you the basics of being a Marine. You have six weeks left here and then most of you will graduate and be assigned to other units as Marines. Two

weeks on the weapons range and four weeks learning how to fight and survive out in the open.”

He looks at the individual recruits standing in the formation in front of him and says, “I can’t afford to lighten up on you guys, I would be doing you a disservice if I did. But I can dispense with most of the chicken shit. You men know why you’re here. So, unless you make me change my mind, we’re gonna conduct ourselves like the Marines we all hope to be.”

Looking from recruit to recruit he asks, “Good enough for you?”

As one thunderous voice they reply, “Sir, Yes sir.

Chapter IV

Smoke still rises in places, lifting slowly towards the dark grey sky, vanishing, after a few seconds into the approaching darkness. The village was called Celene. Once a pretty place, it is now a grid work of rubble delineated by cracked and cratered streets. Water mains and gas lines have long since ceased spewing their life supporting contents into the air, falling quickly back to earth and running randomly down the once clean streets till they find a sewer or crater and disappear. Ironically, most of the damage to this town has been done by the indigenous population in an effort to drive out the Macoute.

Due to the proximity of several mines and quarries, the Macoute had setup a temporary headquarters here. After two weeks of intense counter attacks, using artillery the Aquitainian military has driven the Macoute out and leveled the town in order to deny its use to the invaders. All that is left are small sections of wall here and there, most not more than chest high. With the exception of a small, squat, one room building close to the center of town, Celene is a ruin.

The solitary building had been a laboratory dealing with things which, if not handled correctly, had a tendency to detonate. For this reason, it had been heavily reinforced during its construction.

Despite two direct hits the building is only partially damaged. The Macoute had managed to supply the building with portable power and water before being driven off.

The counter offensive by the humans has resulted in at least a temporary Macoute withdrawal from the area.

The SurTac commando watching the building from cover about a hundred yards away is among the first of the troops assigned

to reoccupy the place and determine what has happened to those residents unable to get out before the Macoute had taken the town three months before.

As he watches, a squad of Planetary Marines comes into view. They pause for a few moments and then, instead of heading directly for the small building, start a perimeter search, making sure they are not walking into an ambush. After watching the marines with approval for a several moments, the SurTac heads straight for the building, keeping out of sight of the marines. He has already determined that the village is clear. He knows that if any Macoute are still about, they will be in the building. Remaining undetected by the marines should give him about twenty minutes in the building alone.

The door to the building is a heavy steel affair and has been sprung by one of the explosions which had leveled the town. It is pulled almost shut and as he approaches the SurTac can see the not quite right light that the Macoute favor coming from within. One of the things the human scientists have learned about the Macoute is that, while they are visually more acute than humans, they are not as tolerant of intensity. As a result, they prefer to generate an odd hue of light for their visual needs. It distorts human visual perception just enough to be uncomfortable. On the plus side, the lack of tolerance for intensity gives humans a slight edge when fighting during the peak daylight hours.

The SurTac reaches the side of the building about fifteen feet down the wall from the door. As he approaches the door he can hear movement from within. Switching the safety off of his weapon he closes to within a foot of the door. A half step and a turn and he will be able to sweep his weapon around the interior, spreading death and destruction in 10mm, armor piercing doses. Something isn't right. The noises from within don't sound like Macoute and he hesitates, his instincts urging him to caution. There have been reports from up the chain of command that a large number of

civilians had not been able to get clear of the Macoute in this area. The noises from within the building sound like someone trying to get free from some sort of containment. He can hear a repeated rattling and expulsions of breath indicating great physical strain.

Reaching into a pocket of his armored vest he extracts a small mirror on an expandable wand. Opening the wand about fifteen inches, he squats down and carefully pushes the mirror past the edge of the doorframe and into the room. While better than not being able to look at all, the small mirror does not pick up much detail. What he sees however, is enough to confirm his suspicions. There are no Macoute inside and there is someone locked in what appears to be a cell at the other end of the room.

Thinking for a moment, the SurTac decides that he should provide some warning before entering the building. Looking down he picks up a fist size piece of rubble and tosses it into the room. There is a sharp intake of breath from within followed by absolute silence.

In a soft voice he calls, "I'm coming in, don't be afraid." After a few seconds, he does a combat peek around the edge of the doorway. Seeing nothing threatening, he swings his weapon up and enters the room, moving quickly to the side to prevent silhouetting himself in the doorway. The cell is at the other end of the room. It has a lone occupant wearing a dirty, grey coverall, crouched facing into the back corner of the cell.

Chapter V

“I’m here to get you to safety.” He says softly. There is no response and the figure doesn’t move. Moving across the room to the cell, he says’ “Do you hear me? I’m here to help you.”

His aggravation at receiving no response slowly recedes as he nears the cell and realizes that the person in the cell is not normal.

He has heard dark rumors that the Macoute have been infecting some of their captives with a virus designed to alter human body chemistry. It is whispered that the victims, most of whom don’t survive, undergo some horrible physical change.

Looking in the cell, he can see that the rumors must be a least partly true. Even from the back he can see abnormalities. The person in the cell has hair that is different; long and impossibly thick, a shade of midnight black. The proportions are not quite right either. The shoulders are a shade too wide for the hips and the torso doesn’t seem long enough for a man with shoulders that wide. Although unusual, the proportions are not esthetically displeasing.

In a quiet voice, the SurTac says, “I don’t know how long it will take, but I do know they’ll be back. If you don’t want to be here when that happens, then we need to get you out of this cell.”

Looking around he finds what he hopes are the keys to the cell laying partially covered by debris in the corner of the room. He retrieves them and returns to stand at the door to the cell.

After a few moments, the figure in the corner slowly rises to its feet but makes no effort to turn and face him.

Trying keys in the lock and not to betray his impatience, the SurTac speaks quietly, “We really do need to get moving.”

Finding the correct key and opening the cell door, he says, "You need to know that they will be back, sooner rather than later and that, while I won't leave you here, I won't be able to turn them back."

After a few seconds of silence, the figure, still facing away, speaks in a rusty, unused voice, "Why would you stay with me if they returned?"

As he replies he notices that the voice is also strange, slightly raspy and deep enough for a man but without the timbre and depth a man's voice should have. "Because we are of the same people. Because we must stick together to survive as a species." And after a pause, "Because you have suffered enough at their hands."

The figure emits a small sob as he speaks and turning to face him, speaks slowly saying, "I am no longer of the same people as you."

As the figure faces him, the SurTac is rendered absolutely speechless. It is a woman, obviously altered by what the Macoute have done to her, but to him, startling, beautiful and exotic!

After a few moments he regains his speech and says, "No matter what they have done to you, we are of the same race. I could no more leave you here than I could my sister or my mother." Reaching out a hand to her he continues, "Come away with me now. They will be back soon and we cannot be here when they do."

Looking at his hand for several seconds, she nods her head once and ignoring his hand, steps around him and out of the cell.

A noise from right outside the building stops her in her tracks. The SurTac strides silently past her and using his mirror, looks out the door. After a second he relaxes minutely and says, "They're ours. Let me speak with them and then we can go."

A look of agony crosses her face and she says, "I cannot bear what I have become nor the looks and thoughts that will come from those who see me. Please, kill me now, and spare me what is to come."