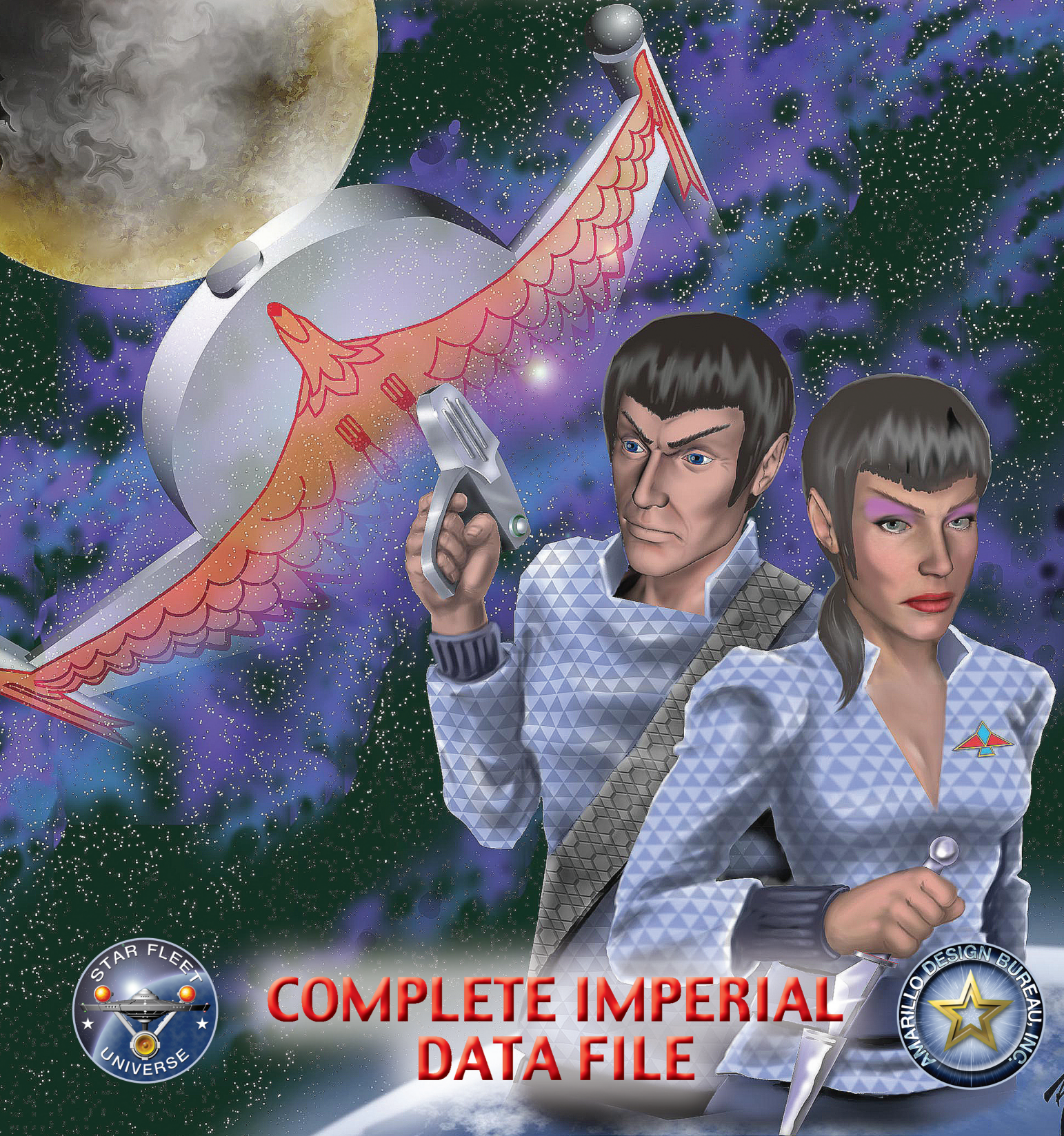


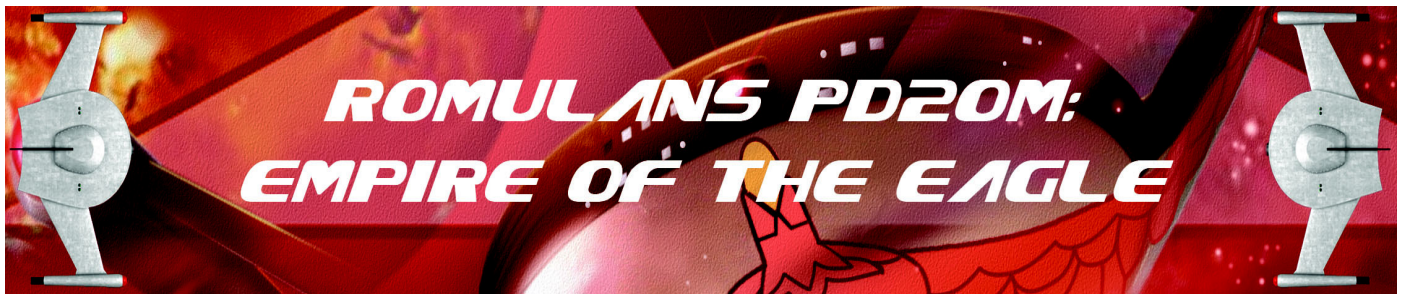
ROMULANS



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DATA FILE



Max



Conquest and War in the Star Fleet Universe

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by John A. Picheco

Y179, Planet Terimene, Romulan Colony near Gorn Border

Pente-Centurion Falshin felt grim as he walked towards the governor's office. He knew the governor was not going to be happy about the news; she never liked bad news. Falshin estimated that, in about 30 hours, the governor and he would be dead or prisoners of the Gorns.

Terimene was a mining colony, one that mined rich ore and processed it into iridium, rhodium, and manganese, all things that the Romulan Star Empire needed. Governor Slatoris was a rising star of House Aurelius, one of the most powerful of the Romulan political factions. Her House had won control of Terimene in a power play two years earlier. She needed a successful tour in a major industrial production center to advance her career, and the self-contained colony had become very much a luxury resort for her and other functionaries of the House.

Pente-Centurion Falshin commanded the military garrison, which consisted only of a warning station, a century of ground troops, and some ground-based phasers, enough to drive away a pirate but an easy target for Gorn Marines. His career was stalled and he would never be promoted to tribune, a fate he had long come to terms with. Part of the deal that ended the power play was that the military forces on Terimene had to be commanded by an officer not affiliated with any house, one supposedly neutral in the power plays that the houses continually engaged in. With the largely honorary promotion from major-centurion to pente-centurion, Falshin had found the post a comfortable retirement.

Upon reaching the governor's office, he told the secretary that he needed to see the governor, and said that it was so urgent it could not wait. The governor didn't hesitate and summoned him into her office. Falshin walked up to the governor's desk, came to attention, saluted, and waited.

"Centurion, whenever you formally report like that, it's bad news. So, let's have it. What went wrong this time?"

Falshin hesitated, then blurted it out, "Governor, a Gorn fleet has broken through the Second Star Legion and is headed this way. The fleet should arrive at Terimene in 22 hours."

The governor opened a drawer and took out a computer storage crystal and handed it to him. "This crystal,

sealed by the Praetor, gives me authority to seize control of military assets during any emergency. As commander of the local military post, you now come under my command. We must evacuate the colonial staff and the rhodium. The *Treachery* is the largest warship here, yes?" The cruiser had been sent here to await a repair ship.

"Yes, Governor, but she sustained heavy damage and crew losses. Ante-Commander Terin will have difficulty getting the ship out of range of the Gorns, and it will be a prime target for them."

The governor was still looking up at him. "The *Cetus* and *Draco* are both too slow." They were old frigates awaiting a convoy to guard. "I guess it's going to be the *Kishawk*. Contact Major-Tribune T'Finn and let him know we are commandeering his ship." The governor hesitated. "Tell T'Finn that he and most of his crew, fighters, and combat supplies are to transfer to *Treachery* and help to get her out of here. Terrin, T'Finn, and all three ships can leave whenever they want. I want *Kishawk* to be ready to leave, with all of my personnel and records on board, and all the refined metals, in ten hours. You will command *Kishawk*."

"Take your leave."

Centurion Falshin saluted, walked from the room, and thought to himself: *We are evacuating, and it looks like I will not be dead in 30 hours.* A slight smile grew on his face as he found himself profiting from a house power play for the first time in his life. Being ordered to take command of a ship was clearly a promotion; not being killed by the Gorns was clearly a good career move. She was bribing him with his own life to ensure her escape, which made sense given that T'Finn was loyal to House Antreidies and therefore a political rival. Falshin's own second-in-command, Major-Centurion Halkon, came from House Pentalion and was here to keep an eye on Slatoris and Aurelius. He would be left behind to make a glorious stand against the Gorns. Halkon would die or be a prisoner in 30 hours. Falshin smiled again, realizing that even in a military disaster, one of the Great Houses had found a way to harm not just one, but two of the other Great Houses.

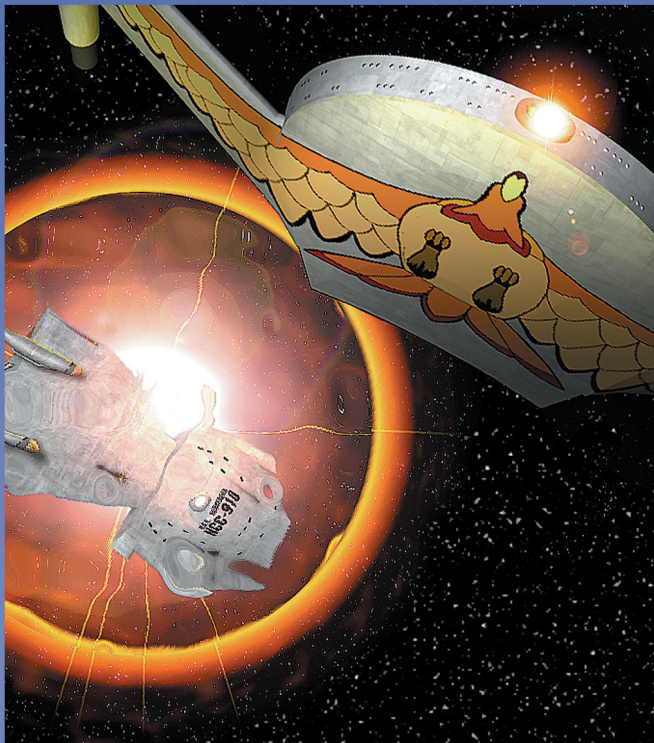
After Centurion Falshin left, the governor pushed a button on the desk. "Meri, cancel all appointments and go to file number two and execute. Understood?" After the secretary replied, the governor stood up, straightened her skirt, and quickly walked to the bathroom, her long black hair flowing behind her.



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