

# **The Neutronium Alchemist Conflict Study Guide**

**The Neutronium Alchemist Conflict by Peter F.  
Hamilton**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">The Neutronium Alchemist Conflict Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 1, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 2, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 3, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 4, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 5, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict.....</a>	<a href="#">27</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 6, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict.....</a>	<a href="#">33</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 7, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict.....</a>	<a href="#">38</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 8, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict.....</a>	<a href="#">45</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 9, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict.....</a>	<a href="#">49</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 10, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict.....</a>	<a href="#">54</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 11, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict.....</a>	<a href="#">58</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 12, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict.....</a>	<a href="#">64</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 13, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict.....</a>	<a href="#">69</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 14, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict.....</a>	<a href="#">73</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">77</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">96</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">104</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">116</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">122</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">124</a>



# Plot Summary

The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict is the fourth book of a six-part science fiction series by Peter F. Hamilton. This was originally released as three longer books in the U.K. The series tells the story of the terrible effects of souls returning from the dead to possess the bodies of the living. This book explores the conflicts that arise from this situation, as well as the new alliances that must be forged in order to combat the threat. The main storyline of the book revolves around the attempt to capture a scientist called Mzu, who has invented a powerful super-weapon that she intends to use for her own revenge. Joshua, Monica and Samuel must stop her and neutralize the threat of the weapon before it falls into the hands of the possessed. Meanwhile, many other characters' side plots are followed as they cope with the effects on their own lives of the conflict between living and possessed.

The Confederation is a loose alliance of all the planets that mankind has colonized, including their very different and often opposing governments. These are roughly split into the Adamists, who live on planets and asteroids, and the Edenists, who can link minds with each other and dwell in living habitats. There are also exceptions, such as the independent habitats of Tranquillity and Valisk. There are also several alien races with whom the humans are in contact, of which the Kiint and the Tyrathca are mentioned in this book. As the book opens, the Confederation are at war with Capone's Organization of the possessed, and various other planets have been invaded or taken over. As the story develops, the various factions within the Confederation finally begin to put aside their differences in order to fight their mutual enemy. The Confederation Navy, the Kulu Kingdom, Tranquillity, and the Edenists begin a joint effort to liberate Ombey, one of the Kulu worlds, from the possessed. On Ombey, Stephanie and a group of other possessed adults gather all the living children they can find and bring them to safety. The Confederation also plans to ambush Capone, using Tranquillity as a base. Unfortunately, Capone is aware of the ambush, and plans an attack of his own against Tranquillity.

Joshua, Monica and Samuel are all searching for Mzu. They have tracked her as far as the asteroid Ayacucho, but due to their own suspicions of each other and the interference of the possessed, she manages to slip away. They follow her to the planet Nyvan, but Capone and his possessed followers have also managed to find her. As Joshua and the various agencies desperately try to stop the possessed from capturing or killing Mzu, they find that they must now work together in order to survive. Trapped inside a foundry shed as the possessed close in on them, they manage to escape in a torrent of water. After climbing out, Joshua's ship blasts the shed and his spaceplane lands to collect everyone. The whole group manage to escape before a huge ironberg, sent by the possessed, falls on the planet. Joshua flies them all to the coordinates of the Alchemist super-weapon but Capone's possessed arrive shortly after. They are forced to fire the weapon into a gas giant, causing it to erupt in a massive nuclear explosion that destroys Capone's ships. Finally safe, Joshua returns Mzu to Tranquillity only to find that the habitat has vanished. It does not appear to have been blown up, but the



possessed have the power to remove whole planets from the universe, and Joshua and his team fear the worst.

Elsewhere in the galaxy, Louise, her sister Genevieve, and their possessed companion Fletcher, manage to make it to Earth's asteroid halo. Fletcher plans to try to stop the evil Quinn Dexter from destroying Earth, but they are stopped and arrested by Earth's security. Meanwhile, Quinn Dexter blows up one of Nyvan's asteroids, knowing that the fragments will rain down on the planet, causing destruction and clogging up its atmosphere. He plans to cause similar chaos and suffering on Earth. Unlike Fletcher, he succeeds in passing through the security checks and makes it to Earth.

As Syrinx searches for answers about death and the beyond, Erick Thakrar is forced to fight the possessed over and over as he attempts to take vital information to the Confederation. When Erick meets Syrinx he is a broken man, and begs to be put into zero-tau. Syrinx flies to Tranquillity to help prepare for the ambush of Capone, but is caught there when the Organization attacks.

The Deadnight kids from Koblat and Gerald Skibbow, who is trying to save his daughter from possession, finally manage to get passage to Valisk, but when they arrive the habitat has vanished. The hellhawk ship they are travelling in decides to fly them to Capone instead, which ironically will actually bring Gerald closer to his daughter. On Valisk, Rubra finally succeeds in persuading Dariat to join himself with the habitat personality. This gives them the power to remove the habitat from the universe to a place that the possessed will not be able to remain in their stolen bodies.

As each character suffers at the hands of the possessed, they attempt to come to terms with what the beyond means for them. For many, the prospect of eternal suffering in the beyond, that can only be relieved by possession of the living, is too much to bear. As humanity fights the possessed on all fronts, they are forced to ask themselves the question of why fight an enemy that you will become?



# Chapter 1, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict

## Chapter 1, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Summary

The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict, by Peter F. Hamilton is the fourth book in a six part series of science fiction books. Humanity is now faced with the threat of dead souls returning to possess the living, a situation that requires the cooperation of several opposing factions. In this book, the main threat comes from Capone's expanding Organization of possessed, and from the Alchemist, a super-doomsday weapon that could destroy all humanity. Mzu, the inventor of the Alchemist, struggles in her misguided revenge mission against the planet that destroyed her world. The starship captain Joshua, the ESA or Kulu Kingdom intelligence agent Monica and the Edenist Samuel must learn to work together in order to prevent the weapon from falling into the wrong hands. The Neutronium Alchemist is an exploration of the more violent aspects of human nature, and the causes and effects of conflict. It is set in a science fiction universe in which humans enjoy advanced technology such as space-travel, cure-all medical 'nanonic' packages, and electronics that connect directly to the brain.

As the book opens, Alkad Mzu, the Garissan scientist who invented the Alchemist, is on the asteroid Ayacucho looking for help with her revenge mission. Ikela, an ex-Garissan navy officer who she had gone to for assistance, has been killed, and she is forced to turn to his daughter Voi for help. Voi takes her to meet Lodi, an electronics expert. Mzu hopes that together they can use the doomsday weapon against the sun of Omuta, the planet responsible for destroying her home world. This is not something the Confederation can allow to happen. All the secret agencies of the various governments are looking for her, as is Joshua Calvert, who has been sent by Lone Saldana, the ruler of the habitat Tranquillity.

Joshua and his crew land at Ayacucho. The crew demand to know what their mission really involves, and Joshua explains about Mzu and her doomsday weapon. He and his crew try to find information in a local club. Joshua finds out that Mzu is on the asteroid and begins his search for her, but he is stopped by a CNIS officer called Pauline Webb. Joshua now knows that he and his crew are being watched. This irritates him but also gives him hope, as it suggests that the other agencies are no closer than he to finding Mzu.



## Chapter 1, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Analysis

The title of this book reflects the main theme of the story: conflict. Conflict is seen everywhere, in every society and circumstance, not just in the struggle against the possessed. In this chapter, the reader can see how conflict arises from feelings of separation, as well as the need to belong. The younger generation of the Garissan refugees appear to be more fiercely patriotic than their parents, even though it is the parents who suffered through the genocide of their people. It is the younger generation who urge revenge, and who support Mzu unquestioningly. Even those who know relatively little about her support her with dancing cheerleader stickers. They hear that she is being sought by off-world intelligence agencies and see this as outsiders attacking one of their own. They group together, desperate to feel like they belong to something. These young men and women have grown up with no sense of identity or belonging, encouraged by the older generation to think of a dead world as their home. They do not quite fit in on the Dorados, and feel cheated of some lost birthright. Rather than attempting to blend into the culture of the Dorados and feel a sense of belonging here, they find that they can enjoy a greater sense of belonging by separating themselves. They have formed a minority group with a strong purpose of revenge and their very separateness from everyone else has given them the sense of identity that they crave.

The same idea is repeated with the Deadnight kids. The Deadnights would normally have no common ground on which to group together, feeling isolated, lacking a strong sense of belonging to anything bigger. By grouping around the Deadnight cause, they have formed a minority group that separates itself from everyone else, finding a sense of belonging and purpose in that separation. It seems that it is human nature to want to feel like one belongs, to seek a particular group to fit into and give a sense of purpose. Oddly, it is this need to belong and differentiate oneself from the crowd that causes separation, and it is this that can often lead to conflict.

These groups of people will often need a symbol or icon to rally around. For the younger generation of Garissans, it is their skin color, lost culture and the figure of Mzu. For the Deadnight kids, it is the red scarves tied around their ankles and the figure of Kiera Salter. Though it may seem odd that any living humans would want to go willingly to the possessed, for the Deadnights Kiera and her possessed represent a new chance, a new life of acceptance, fellowship and purpose. Though the readers know she is lying, this is a powerful message for the Deadnight kids. The Deadnights tend to be younger people, a little naïve, disillusioned with their society, unhappy in life, desperate for change and companionship and love. It is not really that surprising that the overlooked, dissatisfied members of society would group together and respond to such a message.

Conflict does not just rest in the disaffected areas of a society, however. Even among the intelligence agencies, distrust and conflict are apparent. The different agencies do not trust each other with the power offered by Mzu's weapon, though independently they all seem to agree that it should be destroyed. Traditional separation and conflict



between their various governments blinds them to the fact that if they joined forces they might get things done a lot quicker and more efficiently. However, necessity can sometimes bridge gaps that could not otherwise be crossed. The common cause has united Samuel and Monica, who represent two governments that normally distrust each other a great deal. If Samuel and Monica can find common ground, perhaps there is hope for everyone else.

The threat posed by the possessed causes two main reactions in most societies: fear and distrust. This distrust quickly fans into paranoia. Paranoia causes separation, suspicion and conflict. This then only makes it so much easier for the possessed to take over a population. Distrust is now starting to brew among the crew of the Lady Mac, and Joshua realizes that he must stop it quickly. He needs to create an open and honest atmosphere in order to keep everyone functioning well under very stressful circumstances.

At the check-in point at the spaceport, paranoia and suspicion have taken over here too. The immigration service is overly rigorous about searching for possessed. This draws interesting parallels to how our own society responds to the threat of terrorism. Terrorists, like the possessed, can infiltrate our own society and subvert it or destroy it from within. They target innocent people and make themselves stronger through spreading fear and panic. They threaten the foundations and values that certain societies are built on. Modern responses to terrorism include paranoia, distrust, panic and suspicion. Modern immigration has had to increase its security and checks dramatically to deal with the potential problem. Often, innocent people can feel like they are being harassed and victimized. Many argue that the more extreme measures taken, as well as the inflamed media coverage, only serve to cause increased panic and fear. This, they argue, is exactly what the terrorists want.

Possession also threatens the beliefs that people have always lived with. If death is the eternal torture of souls in the beyond, people now need to drastically change how they view death. Religions are strongly affected, as the nature of the beyond and the terrible evils of possession seem to negate the existence of a benevolent god. When Voi's father dies, she is afflicted with the usual shock and grief, but underlying this is the horrible knowledge that he now suffers in the beyond. All death must now carry the question, "Will my loved ones suffer for the rest of eternity?" Whether one used to believe in heaven, or that death was final, this new knowledge is much worse. Even Joshua can't help wondering if his father is one of the many souls trapped forever in the beyond.

The Joshua described in this chapter is a very different Joshua from the character the readers have seen in earlier books. Sarha, one of his crew, finds it very hard to believe that Joshua would go through such extreme emotions over one girl. Sarha thinks about her own relationship with Joshua, which lasted for over six months but was ended so casually that there was no awkwardness involved in her staying on as a member of his crew. In earlier books, we have seen that Joshua has no qualms about sleeping around with several women at once, and that he hates to be tied down. Joshua is only interested in fun and sex. Relationships do not go much deeper for him. How can a man



who treats relationships like this be so distraught over the loss of one lover that he was perfectly happy to abandon on her planet? Perhaps Joshua's character is beginning to change, and the fear, pain and death that he has seen all around him since the possessed took over Lalonde has caused him to reassess his own behavior. The death of his old crew member, Warlow, has also affected him deeply. Warlow told Joshua to start treating his women better. This surprised Joshua at the time, but it seems that he has really been thinking about this comment, and the hurt and pain he may have caused many people. Joshua can be very egotistical and self-centered at times, and it may simply have never occurred to him how his actions could negatively affect the women he enjoys using. Perhaps now Joshua can value the deeper aspects of relationships and has realized that life is not simply about fun and good times.

Sarha claims that Joshua is a very simple man in terms of his emotions, that there is no deceit with him. What you see is what you get. However, Joshua was in fact a little deceitful with Louise. Usually the girls he dates know exactly what kind of man he is and know exactly what they are getting themselves into. They know he is only interested in a fling and casual sex. Louise, on the other hand, thought Joshua was her hero. She imagined that they were embarking on a proper relationship and thinks he will return to marry her. Joshua may not have known the true extent of her feelings, but he certainly knew that she was a young, naïve girl. He knew she was taking their relationship more seriously than him. Perhaps it is this deceit that is now causing Joshua so much guilt and grief. Perhaps Louise, as a simple, honest girl, is closer to the kind of girl that Joshua would see himself settling down with eventually. All other girls have treated him as a thrilling fling, but to Louise he meant so much more. He has never experienced being with someone like her before.

In this chapter, Lone is experiencing a new sense of freedom. She has planted her personality inside the Tranquillity serjeants, and so can experience what they experience. She has never before been able to leave Tranquillity, but now she can at least feel what leaving might be like. In a sense, Tranquillity is her prison. She can never have the freedom that Joshua has, and perhaps it is this that first attracted her to him.

Joshua does not respond well to the serjeants exhibiting Lone's personality, complaining that they would be better if they just had Tranquillity's personality. Joshua does not like the fact that one of his lovers is so close to him, following him around and keeping tabs on him. Though he most likely has no intentions of sleeping around on this mission, he resents her presence. Joshua likes to keep sex and work separate, and he certainly does not want one of his lovers in a position to boss him around. His freedom is precious to him, and he does not like Lone encroaching on it. He also feels uncomfortable seeing his lover's personality inside the monstrous serjeants. Perhaps it is too sharp a reminder of possession, of a soul inside a body that doesn't belong to it.





# Chapter 2, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict

## Chapter 2, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Summary

Chapter 2 moves quickly from one place and character to another, reminding the reader of where all the main characters are, what they are doing, and what problems now face them. Using antimatter weapons, Capone has managed to score a victory at Arnstadt. The planet now belongs to the Organization. He then sends half the fleet against the surrounding asteroid settlements. Capone's actions cause panic in the Confederation. Admiral Aleksandrovich tries to reason with the people that Capone is too strong to go up against yet.

On the ship Villeneuve's Revenge, Captain Duchamp and his crew are told that they will be doing escort duty for Capone's cargo ships. Duchamp tells his crew that he plans to jump away once they have information on Capone to take to the Confederation. This plan is shattered when the Organization liaison officer, Kingsley Pryor, informs them that a small nuclear bomb has been planted on the ship. This bomb must be reset every seven hours or it will explode, and only the liaison officer on another ship has the code. If they jump away, they will die. Duchamp is forced to comply, but Erick and Madeleine secretly begin to search for the hidden bomb.

At Koblat, Jed manages to acquire the details of a starship captain who could take the Deadnight kids to Valisk, but he will have to raise a great deal of money in order to pay for it. Meanwhile, the souls on Norfolk join powers to remove the planet from this universe.

Quinn Dexter arrives at the planet Nyvan and communicates with Twelve-T, a local gang lord, offering to trade his ship if Twelve-T can get them to the surface without any trouble. Twelve-T agrees, and tells them to dock at the asteroid Jesup.

In Exnall, a region on the Kulu planet Ombey, Moyo is looking for transport so that he and Stephanie can take the unpossessed children to safety. He finds a broken van, and meets a possessed straight from the hippy era of Earth. This man, Cochrane, decides to join him and together they fix the van. Meanwhile, Alastair II Saldana, King of the Kulu Empire, is meeting with his advisors to discuss the threat of the possessed. Alastair is informed that everything is going ahead in their plan to use bitek Tranquillity serjeants to fight the possessed on Ombey. Ambassadors have been sent to the Edenists and to Tranquillity to ask for their help in this matter.



## Chapter 2, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Analysis

Throughout chapter 2, the narrative skips from one set of possessed to another, comparing their different actions and motivations. The possessed are not one single force or enemy, and in fact seem to be just as varied as the living. This chapter also contrasts the different living people who are trying to combat the possessed in their own way, as well as exploring the motivations of those who choose to side with them.

Capone is trying to win over support from the Confederation by showing that the possessed and non-possessed can co-operate without conflict. He wants people to think that they will be allowed to live their lives as normal, just under a different government. This can be a powerful message to populations taken over by fear. In any war, it is often the ordinary citizens and innocents who suffer the most. The authority figures can talk about fighting and resisting, but this is not always comforting for the ones who are in the line of fire. Capone's message would appeal to those who simply want peace and do not necessarily care about the high ideals of their government. Though they do not want to be ruled by the possessed, their own safety will take precedent. This is, of course, all lies. Any conquering government will need to drastically change the lives of the people it has conquered in order to maintain control. Besides this, the souls in the beyond are forever crying for bodies and it will only be so long before all the living are possessed. Capone is essentially a very ruthless criminal and his offers of peace and tolerance are a complete pretence. We have seen that he is perfectly willing to use hostages to ensure loyalty, and to break families apart.

Capone is relying on the desperation and fear of the living to blind them to his true nature and the inevitability of their own possession. However, he has miscalculated the reactions of the ordinary people of the Confederation. They have not accepted his propaganda and are begging the Confederation to fight him, not surrender to him. This is probably due in large part to his use of weapons of mass destruction. Using such weapons of terror seems completely incongruous with his peace propaganda, and the people are not going to fall for it. Capone hopes that by taking over planet after planet he will force them to give in, but instead they are the more determined to see him dealt with. Fear can be a great motivator as well as a crippling force. Instead of the terror of infiltration, Capone has presented them with a solid enemy that can be seen, understood and fought. He has now become the Enemy, the symbol of all possessors, and as such is a power that must be destroyed at all costs. Capone may only have succeeded in accelerating the inevitable war between himself and the Confederation.

This, however, is not a good situation for Admiral Aleksandrovich. The people are demanding action against Capone, and will not tolerate much further delay. The Admiral knows that any war fought against Capone will result in massive loss of life. In an ordinary war, this might be justifiable or necessary, but in a war against the possessed any deaths will only increase the ranks of the enemy. As the synopsis on the back of the book offers a summary in the question, "Why fight an enemy you will become?" The Admiral cannot sanction any large scale destruction of planets under the Organization,



as all such planets have been taken from the Confederation. An attack on them would be like shooting himself in the foot. The Organization has no home world to target, making it impossible for the Confederation to retaliate to his weapons of mass destruction with their own. The Admiral must also worry that attacking Capone will consist of attacking his own people. Every single possessed is a living person held captive in their own body. If the possessed are killed, they will be killed too. This is basically a war of hostages, as each possessed holds a living person captive. This is an impossible situation for the Admiral. His first action must be to neutralize the threat of the antimatter weapons. Once these are gone, the advantage will not rest quite so heavily with Capone.

To make matters worse, non-possessed are actually helping Capone. There will always be people drawn by money rather than morals, who will support any cause for a good enough price. The reasons why people might find themselves helping the enemy or aiding a detestable cause are a lot more complicated than this though, as we are shown through several examples. Kingsley Pryor himself expresses scorn and hatred for any living person who would help Capone, but that is exactly what he is doing. Kingsley is held in place through fear as his family are being held hostage. He is fuelled by the conflicting emotions of fear, hate, and self-loathing. Perhaps in another situation he might reason that the lives of a few people are not worth the millions who will die because of Capone, but he cannot bring himself to inflict suffering on his family. He knows that they will not just die, but that they will either be possessed and suffer trapped inside their own bodies, or die and enter eternal pain in the beyond. Faced with this knowledge, Kingsley can do nothing but allow himself to be used by Capone.

On the other hand, there is Duchamp and his crew, who are also held in place by blackmail and threats. They know that death or possession await them if they disobey, and hope that they will be able to escape with information that can be used against Capone. For these reasons, they go along with Capone in the meantime. Kingsley Pryor, and Duchamp and his crew, present just two possibilities for why good men might turn traitor. It is sometimes easy to condemn people for their actions in war, to assert that they should have acted according to a higher moral code without thinking of their own or their family's safety, but to find oneself in such a situation is a very different thing. It is not always so simple as disloyalty and greed that make 'bad' men betray their own side in war.

The narrative now switches to the Deadnight kids, offering us another view of people who have abandoned their own side to go to the enemy. These people are not being coerced by threats and fear, but are switching sides willingly. When compared with what the reader has just seen in the examples of Kingsley and Duchamp's crew, and the Admiral's struggle against the possessed, this seems particularly despicable. Jed's speech, however, reveals a little more about what might make people do such a thing. Jed and the kids on Koblat are extremely unhappy with their own lives. They feel alienated, alone and uncared for. They need to feel a sense of belonging, and instantly respond to Kiera's message of peace and acceptance, of how possession can help them to be a part of something amazing, and most importantly never be alone again. The Deadnight kids are not traitorous or greedy, simply naïve and desperate.



The descriptions of Koblat help us to understand still further why the Deadnights are so desperate to leave. The place is described in increasingly depressing terms including fading colors, bare metal, and "holograms diminishing to blurred smears" (pg. 34.) Even the clothes worn by all the citizens are dull and depressing, while the ship captains wear bright colors, representing the hope and freedom they possess. It is no wonder the Deadnights want to leave. Kiera has been the first person to ever really offer them any kind of future or hope. No one else will help them, and both the authorities and their parents are failing them. To the Deadnight kids, Kiera and the possessed are not an enemy to be fought, but a new and happier way of life to be embraced.

To Jed, however, Kiera symbolizes more than the hope and sense of belonging that he lacks on Koblat. Kiera also symbolizes love, including the affection he has been unable to find anywhere else, but also a sexual love that he craves. He fantasizes about Kiera, and feels that she is somehow a soulmate that he was destined to meet. Kiera's message was deliberately created to evoke such feelings in the young people watching it. She lures victims to her using as much seduction as she can instill into the AV recording. As such, she is like a space-age siren, the creatures of Greek mythology that would lure sailors to their doom with their seductive singing. Alternatively, she could be compared to the devil, who seduces and tempts good people into evil by appealing to their repressed desires.

The disappearance of Norfolk foreshadows the disappearance of Tranquillity at the end of the book. By showing the reader what has happened to Norfolk, the disappearance of Tranquillity is made all the more sinister. Norfolk's disappearance is preceded by a thick red cloud that blocks out the sky. This red cloud seems to symbolize the combined force of the possessed's power, hate, fear and hope, a physical manifestation of the turmoil of all their emotions. Its red color symbolizes the danger, raw power, rage and fear that have gone into the cloud's creation. The red color can also be associated with death, evil and the Devil. For the living watching it develop from their ships above the planet, it is quite clear that the cloud does not represent anything good.

The actual change, when it happens, is described using religious language such as "sacrament" and "rapturous" (pg. 38.) When Norfolk finally disappears, the new universe it enters is ideally suited for the possessed, described in beautiful, peaceful terms. These descriptions make it seem almost as if the possessed have achieved salvation at last, representing their new universe as a self-made heaven. If god does not exist, or if he abandoned the souls to the beyond, perhaps such a course is the only way for humans to ever achieve peace. The possessed have created their own answer to religion. This episode gives us a slightly different view of the possessed, not as mindless, sadistic torturers, but as people who simply want the chance for peaceful existence again and an end to their suffering. After so many years trapped in pain in the beyond, the motives of the possessed are perhaps less easy to condemn. The need to alleviate suffering on that scale could justify just about anything for the soul enduring it.

Now the narrative switches straight from these souls who want peace and safety, to souls who only desire pain and discord. Quinn Dexter and Lawrence want to create pain and fear, rather than escape or give in to it. They do not merely use pain as a weapon,



they actually enjoy inflicting it. Their violence and depravity seem all the more horrible after the peaceful, almost religious scene on Norfolk. Quinn's religion is very different, as he worships the Devil, not god. He refers to his god as Light Bringer or Light Brother, an ironic twist on the idea of a loving god who brings light to the world. The name Lucifer literally means 'light-bringer' because Lucifer was the Roman name for the Dawn Star. According to Christian belief, Lucifer was an angel beloved by god before he fell from grace and became the Devil. By this time, it seems that worship of the Devil has developed into an influential cult among the poorest and most violent areas, the arcologies of Earth. Lucifer himself seems to have changed from a fallen angel to God's brother, giving him a sense of greater power and legitimacy. For those who worship him, the religion is an acceptance and legitimization of the basest and cruelest aspects of human nature. The Devil-worshippers believe that all humans are essentially corrupt, animalistic and brutal, and so all people should behave in this way. Unlike the Deadnight cause, which attracts the desperate and disaffected members of society who just want love and kindness, Lucifer's cult attracts those who have given up on human kindness. Instead, they are looking for the power they can never otherwise enjoy as the disadvantaged classes of a society that simply does not care about them.

The narrative switches again to yet another group of possessed, this time the ones in Exnall on Ombey, who wish to save the non-possessed children. Here, the possessed seem to be desperately clinging on to a sense of their old lives. As a result, their morality is different from the possessed who want power or control, or who just want to leave this universe. Moyo and Stephanie have focused all their attentions onto children, who they see as helpless innocents in the conflict. Helping the children gives them a sense of purpose that they so badly need in a world that seems unfamiliar to them. They have literally usurped other people's lives, and perhaps ensuring the safety of the children allows them to feel somehow justified, or simply provides a diversion from such thoughts. How can the idea of kind, sympathetic souls be reconciled with the truth of what they are: possessors who have tortured people to seize their bodies, and continue to torture the soul trapped inside? The readers wonder why some possessed behave so differently from others, and are forced to question the good and evil that can be found in all humans. It seems that no high moral standards can stand up in the face of eternal pain in the beyond.

Moyo observes that some souls are not coping well with their new lives. Some deal with it by listlessly going about daily activities in a mockery of their former lives, like the street-sweeper who continually sweeps and never talks to anyone, or the shop-keepers who continue business as normal despite the energistic abilities of the possessed making their jobs obsolete. Once the beyond has been escaped, it seems, many possessed lose any sense of purpose and find it hard to adjust to a new life. How long, the readers wonder, will it be before the idea of an eternity of life becomes just as frightening as eternity in the beyond?

While looking for the bus to transport the children, Moyo meets Cochrane, a man from the hippy era. Again, the values of this particular possessed seem completely at odds with the nature of possession. He believes in peace, love, harmony and freedom. However, Cochrane's hippy ideology actually presents the reader with some interesting



moral questions. Cochrane believes that all property is theft because everything belongs to everyone. This immediately negates the idea of possession as there is no such thing as possessions according to his view. A person has no more right to his or her own body than any other soul. Does a body really belong to its owner? These views open up questions about the rights of the possessed. Do the souls of the dead have just as much right to life as the souls of the living?

The author now takes us to a meeting between King Alastair II and his advisors. Now we see how the Kulu Kingdom plans to respond to the threat of possession. First, they bring up the idea of ID bracelets. This is comparable to modern suggestions of combating terrorism by issuing ID cards to keep tabs on people. The need for increased control and surveillance is a typical response to the fear of infiltration. Again, we see how the threat of possession causes paranoia, suspicion and distrust. The second response, however, is much more promising. The Kulu Kingdom plans to ally itself with the Edenists and with Tranquillity in order to fight the possessed using bitek serjeants. This will minimize loss of life, allowing a much more positive victory. The fact that the Kulu Kingdom, so opposed to everything the Edenists stand for, can ally with them is simply astounding. The true miracle, however, is that the Saldanas can go to their own black sheep to ask for help. Tranquillity was created by Michael Saldana, who was immediately excommunicated and cast out of the family for this crime. For such a religious empire, the creation of a bitek habitat amounted to a terrible sin. Since then, relations have been very strained between the Tranquillity Saldanas or the Lords of Ruin and the Kulu Saldanas. This is yet another example of how conflict can bring together the most unlikely alliances. It is a shame that only in times of crisis, or when a common enemy presents itself, can people resolve their differences. The fact that the Kulu Empire is willing to take this step is a very positive thing, as the threat of possession cannot be fought if people remain divided.

Nyvan is another example of how a common cause can bring people together despite their differences, but human nature will never allow such a situation to last. Nyvan is a world that has fallen to ruin from being too multicultural. Too many different cultures and societies on one world led to continuous conflict. Notably, people put their differences aside when the planet still needed a lot of work. Joint causes can briefly unite people, but conflict will always creep back when a crisis is over. Nyvan seems to point to the inevitable fact that it is human nature to form small separate groups that cannot interact peaceably with others. When differences meet, they almost always end in conflict. This problem was solved by creating whole worlds built around the same culture. While this idea sounds sensible at first, it is clear from the Deadnight kids and the young Garissans that humans will always find ways to divide themselves and create conflict. It seems that only through separation and conflict can people achieve a true sense of their own identity.

Finally, chapter 2 gives the readers a little more insight into the character of lone. We see a woman who has tremendous responsibility placed on her shoulders, but who longs to be care-free. lone loves the sea. She has a view of the ocean from her apartment, loves to swim, and even her eyes are as blue as the water. This symbolizes her free and easy nature, which can just as easily be calm and gentle as become



piercing and forceful, like the sea. The sea also represents freedom for lone, the kind of peace and joy she experiences when she swims. lone is trapped by her responsibilities and by her connection to Tranquillity. She would not necessarily wish for things to be different, but at the same time a part of her longs for freedom and adventure. This is perhaps why she has been so strongly drawn towards Joshua, who represents everything that she cannot have.



## Chapter 3, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict

### Chapter 3, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Summary

On Villeneuve's Revenge, Erick Thakrar has found the hidden bomb. Carefully, he manages to detach it and casts it out of the ship. There is now nothing stopping Duchamp and his crew from fleeing Capone's grasp. Duchamp faces Capone's representative, Kingsley, and informs him that they will be leaving. Kingsley immediately datavises to Erick that he knows Erick is an undercover CNIS or Navy intelligence officer and threatens to tell Duchamp and the crew. He also points out that as an associate of Capone he is more valuable to the Confederation alive than dead. Erick is forced to persuade Duchamp not to kill him.

Meanwhile Cherri Barnes, a crew member of Meyer's blackhawk Udat that Alkad Mzu destroyed in the last book, has just been released from the beyond into a new body. She tells Capone's men where to find Mzu.

Ralph Hiltch, Kelman and Prince Collis arrive at the main Edenist habitat, orbiting the planet Jupiter. They have come to ask the Edenist Consensus if they will aid them in their plans to free Mortonridge on Ombey of the possessed. After deliberating on the matter, the Edenists agree to help.

Syrinx and her voidhawk Oenone, a living ship that is mind-linked to its captain, arrive at the Kiint home world. Syrinx is taken to a Kiint who has agreed to talk to her, but the alien will only give her cryptic answers to her questions about the possessed. The Kiint ends the meeting by telling Syrinx that humanity is looking for the wrong answers. They should be looking for their destiny instead.

Quinn lands on Jesup, one of Nyvan's asteroids. Twelve-T is waiting for him with armed men, but Quinn easily kills them. Quinn slices off the top of Twelve-T's head and removes his metal skull-plate to expose his brain. He now has Twelve-T completely at his mercy. Quinn demands that Twelve-T help him acquire a starship to take him to Earth.

### Chapter 3, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Analysis

Whereas chapter 2 focused on the possessed and how various groups have reacted to them, chapter 3 concerns itself more with individual characters and their motivations. We see how the possessed have affected these people's lives on an individual basis.





Erick Thakrar has changed a great deal since his introduction in the first book of the series. He has lost a lot of his naiveté and his innocent ideals of heroism and patriotism. When he began his undercover assignment, he imagined that he was the 'good guy' catching the 'bad guy.' He saw the world in black and white, but now he sees many shades of grey. Now, he realizes that bad guys can be good guys and vice versa, and that no one's character or motivations are ever simple. The possessed represent a terrifying new enemy, forcing a situation in which he must work with the man he detests. Until now, Duchamp was the clear villain and Erick's purpose was to bring him to justice. Now the universe is a much more complicated and dangerous place, and men like Duchamp are simply not important in the scheme of things.

In his time with Duchamp, Erick has also had to compromise many of his high ideals and views of morality in order to bring about a greater good. He was forced to fire on a ship, resulting in the death of a teenage girl called Tina. The memory of this has haunted him ever since, and he will often mention Tina in times of distress, as he does here. He must wonder constantly if she now suffers in the beyond because of him. Erick has also found himself beginning to like some members of Duchamp's crew, who have faced the possessed with him and even helped save his life. He is becoming embroiled in one adventure after another with them, and his feelings towards them, as well as to himself, have become very complicated. Erick is now much more willing to compromise and carry out unpleasant or even immoral tasks in the pursuit of what he sees as a greater good.

Like Erick, Ralph Hiltch finds it difficult to let go of the past, especially his own feelings of guilt and blame. He still blames himself for bringing the possessed to Ombey, and no doubt also for abandoning people on the surface of Lalonde. He recoils in embarrassment or horror at the attempts of his government to praise and reward him for his efforts. He does not consider himself a hero. He has seen too much loss and death. Ralph has fought the possessed first hand, an experience that has shattered any illusions of being able to deal with the threat alone. Now he is personally helping to see through his idea for liberating Mortonridge, which involves the cooperation of Confederation, Kulu and Edenists. Only together can they hope to have any chance of winning. This is a lesson that he most likely carries from Lalonde, where each separate agency tried to capture a possessed in their own way. Many people were lost who might not have been had they all been able to mount a combined, organized reaction to the danger.

At Jupiter, Ralph and his companions see a bitek habitat for the first time, coming face to face with the technology that their own culture has taught them to consider evil and ungodly. Instead of reacting with distaste, they reflect on how creating ties of friendship between the two cultures would benefit all. The Edenists think in much the same way. They consider the plan to liberate Mortonridge foolhardy, as it will not provide any great gain or advantage but only an illusory hope. However, they agree that they must take this opportunity to begin to build bonds of friendship and trust with the Adamists. Not only will cooperation and friendship lead to the best situation for combating the possessed, it will also help to create a better future for all. As usual, the Edenists



represent the voice of reason, and the Adamists the voice of emotion, but in this particular case their two approaches are in agreement.

Admiral Aleksandrovich is also having to come to terms with what the threat of the possessed means for him and his people. He too, expresses the wish that all the different governments and their agencies could cooperate for the greater good. The Admiral feels pushed from all sides by political problems. Faced with the demands and fears of the people, the threat of Mzu and her super-weapon, and the effects that quarantine is having on the economy, he cannot react to the possessed in the way that he feels is most sensible. This is a reminder that war is not simply about doing what is needed to win at all costs. There are wider problems, such as political alliances and rivalries, the morale of the people, and the long term effects of the war to be taken into consideration as well. The Admiral is feeling pressurized to deal with Capone in some big, dramatic way that will send a message of hope to the people, but he knows that this will only lead to more death, and so to an inevitable swelling of the enemy's forces. He cannot respond in any traditional sense, because the possessed are an enemy like none ever fought before. For all his military training and expertise, the Admiral is at a loss, and he is running out of time.

Syrinx is only just beginning to overcome her ordeal at the hands of the possessed on Pernik, Atlantis. Natural inquisitiveness is pushing through her fear of the unknown, as Wing-Tsit Chong had predicted it would. The reader can get a sense of Syrinx's curiosity through the long descriptions of what she sees and experiences, and the questioning wonderment she brings to it all. This is the first time that Syrinx has ever visited a place that is truly new, somewhere very few people have explored. There is little information surrounding the Kiint and their world, forcing her to form her own opinions and observations. This is an incredibly big step for Syrinx, who has never dared to venture somewhere quite so different and unpredictable before. Since she was tortured by the possessed, she has been undergoing treatment on an Edenist habitat. Everything around her has felt safe and secure. Now she must face her fears and explore how she truly feels about the possessed.

Syrinx and Oenone are overjoyed to find out from the Kiint that voidhawks and habitats possess souls of their own. Oenone points out that this means they will not be separated by death. Even though all they know of death is the eternal suffering of souls in the beyond, this knowledge is received very positively by them. For Edenists, perhaps the worst fear concerning death is not of death itself but the fear of separation. They live their whole lives connected to each other and to their habitats, and feel great sorrow for the Adamists who are always alone inside their own heads. This is why they have created the habitats to store the memories of the dead in an eternal connected, melded consciousness. With this, they know that they will never be alone. Now Syrinx and Oenone are happy to find out that voidhawks and their captains need not be separated either. Even if Syrinx will be separated from the other Edenists, she will never lose Oenone and so never be alone.

The Kiint also informs Syrinx that she does not consider stored memory to be the same as a person's soul. For the Kiint, the stored personalities inside a habitat do not



represent the continued existence of the individuals from whom the memories were taken. This is a huge shock to an Edenist. Their whole attitude to life and death is based around the fact that they never need to fear death. They will continue to be a part of the Edenist society and consciousness and so never need fear the unknown. The Kiint's revelation suggests that Edenist souls do 'move on' to some form of existence beyond death, separate from their habitats and their stored memories. Perhaps Wing Tsit-Chong's assessment of Syrinx's personality, that she fears the unknown and will need to learn to face it, is a wider view that should be applied to the whole of Edenism. In this way, Syrinx can be seen to represent Edenism, and her journey for knowledge the journey that her entire civilization must undergo.

If so, this may relate to the Kiint's statement that fear is the companion of truth. Humans fear the unknown, and death is certainly the greatest unknown. To deal with it, they try to comfort themselves with thoughts of heaven or salvation, or that death will be the end of all feeling and suffering. With understanding and greater knowledge, such as of the beyond, comes greater fear. Perhaps the answer to conquering death and the beyond is simply not to fear it. Could this be what Laton meant when he suggested that Edenists will not get trapped in the beyond? Edenists have never feared death, so their souls have never become trapped. If so, will this change when Edenists realize their souls are not contained within the habitats after death? Through the Kiint's cryptic hints, the author provides some interesting questions, but no answers. Like Syrinx, we are left to ponder and decide for ourselves, and perhaps come to the conclusion that there are no easy answers.

Through Syrinx's visit to the Kiint home world, the reader also gains a greater insight into the Kiint themselves. The Kiint are mysterious and powerful. Everything about their planet and society seems somehow unreal or fake: the artificial moons that are seemingly impossible to have created, the too tall, bright green grass, the lollipop shaped trees with their blue bark, and the strange nature of the aliens themselves. The Kiint world seems almost like a child's painting, too bright and colorful and simple. Syrinx wonders where all the signs of a technological civilization are, as there are no roads or indications of machinery or industry, and no high-tech gadgets in the Kiint's home. All this adds up to an idea of a very powerful and advanced race, far beyond human understanding. The unreal, illusory nature of the world, as well as the impossible feats such as the orbiting moons and the transport that Syrinx is taken in, seem more like the creations of the possessed than the living. Could the Kiint hold some kind of energistic power like the possessed? In facing the possessed and the knowledge of the beyond, were the Kiint left with strange powers or a higher understanding of the universe? Perhaps, like Quinn Dexter, they were able to regain control of their bodies while holding on to the powers of the possessed. The reader is forced to question how the Kiint managed to defeat the possessed, or whether they really ever defeated them at all. Is it possible that all Kiint are in fact possessed? Or are the Kiint simply far more technologically advanced than humans ever realized? The reader should take note of the strangeness of the Kiint homeworld. The Kiint are holding a lot back from the humans, and this is the first hint that they are not all that they seem.



Finally, the reader is given an even deeper look into the character of Quinn Dexter. Unlike the other characters in this chapter, Quinn deals with the concept of possession by reveling in its possibilities. He sees it as a gift from a god who has chosen him to be his prophet. For Quinn, possession is not a shock or a philosophical problem to be dealt with. It is an affirmation of everything he has ever believed. Quinn believes that the universe has a force of evil that works to bring pain and suffering to people. He calls this force The Light Brother or God's Brother, meaning Lucifer or Satan. Possession has given Quinn's life legitimacy and purpose. Now all his sadistic, violent urges that attracted him to the religion in the first place have been justified, and his belief that all people contain an inner serpent, or evil, seems proven true. For Quinn, possession itself is not an independent phenomenon or force, but simply the instrument of a higher power.

Quinn's behavior is not simply driven by his religious convictions, however. Rather, his religious beliefs are a justification of his own sadistic nature. Quinn enjoys inflicting pain and suffering on others for the feeling of superiority and power that it gives him. We can see this in the way that Quinn hates to be defied. He cannot stand feeling inferior or small, and will go out of his way to humiliate anyone who opposes him. Perhaps this is due to a life spent in the arcologies where he had very little power or control over his own life. Quinn's behavior now is his form of revenge against a world that has never given him anything or supported him. Through his violent acts, he reasserts his pride and dominance after the humiliations of his life, particularly Banneth's betrayal of him. It is revealing that even though he claims to be solely dedicated to carrying out his evil god's plans, he is still focused on going to Earth to kill Banneth. Quinn is a man who can never forget or forgive a past humiliation. It is also revealing that all Quinn's methods for ensuring loyalty to him involve the establishment of absolute authority and control, either through fear, dependence or desperation. This is why Quinn removes Twelve-T's skull-plate. With his exposed brain, Twelve-T is now vulnerable and completely reliant on Quinn to keep him alive. With access to Twelve-T's brain, Quinn is also now symbolically in control of everything Twelve-T thinks and feels. This is the kind of power Quinn Dexter relishes.



# Chapter 4, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict

## Chapter 4, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Summary

On Ayacucho, Voi manages to acquire passage on the starship of her ex-lover, Prince Lambert. Voi then manages to sneak Mzu and herself out to the ship in two storage pods, avoiding the security blocks in the spaceport. Mzu wants to head to a place with military industrial facilities and no questions asked, so Lambert sets a course for Nyvan.

On the Lady Mac, Joshua has cleared the crew and his ship of the nanonic surveillance devices that were planted on them. Joshua reviews what they have found out so far and decides that Ikela's daughter Voi is their best lead. After seducing a young girl in one of Ayacucho's bars, Joshua manages to get invited to a party later that day, where he hopes he will meet some of Voi's friends. Joshua and his crew are about to leave the bar when a couple of possessed walk in. A fight breaks out between the possessed and the Tranquillity serjeants. The various intelligence agencies who are now tracking Joshua also join in. Between them, the possessed are killed quickly.

Back at the Lady Mac, a nasty surprise is waiting for Joshua. His brother Liol, who he never knew existed, stops him and claims his right to the ship. Joshua is angry and suspicious, but Liol will not back down. Joshua demands a blood test, which comes up positive. Liol is defiantly Joshua's brother.

Joshua decides to attend the party that night, despite the increasing numbers of the possessed that are beginning to take over the asteroid. There, he meets Adok Dala, Voi's old boyfriend, and Shea, Prince Lambert's girlfriend. Joshua's intuition tells him that Shea is the one he wants. As he grabs her and heads for the exit, the intelligence agencies grab Adok. Joshua races to the ship as the Tranquillity serjeants protecting him stop to fight two possessed. It is not long before Joshua runs into another possessor. The possessed man attacks him, but Shea hits the fire alarm panel to quench the white fire burning his arm. Joshua attempts to exorcise the soul, but the man just laughs at him and explains that he is a Sunni Muslim and the Christian exorcism means nothing to him. It looks as if Joshua's time might be up, but a Tranquillity serjeant appears just in time and shoots the possessed. As they hurry to the ship, three Capone Organization ships arrive at the asteroid.

Safe on their respective ships, Joshua and the intelligence agencies question their captives. Adok tells Samuel and Monica that Lambert was Voi's ex-boyfriend. They examine Lambert's flight vector to see where he might be heading and set a course to investigate. Shea has no idea of Lambert's plans but surprisingly Liol can provide the answer instead, as he helped Lambert to program the vector. Joshua also sets a course for Nyvan.



## Chapter 4, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Analysis

Chapter 4 focuses on events on Ayacucho surrounding Mzu and the various people trying to stop her. Mzu's schemes are beginning to come together as she manages to stay just one step ahead of her pursuers. Joshua and the various government agencies seem too intent on monitoring each other to focus entirely on Mzu. Distrust and paranoia have clouded their judgment, allowing Mzu to slip through as her pursuers all get in each other's way. As the possessed begin to take over Ayacucho, the agencies, as well as the readers, are reminded of what is really at stake. No government wants its rivals to get hold of Mzu's weapon, but anything would be preferable to it falling into the hands of the possessed. If someone like Capone were to acquire it, the Confederation, the Kulu Kingdom and the Edenists would all be forced to surrender, leaving Capone free to spread possession throughout the galaxy. On a smaller scale, the readers also fear for the lives of the main characters as they seem to take bigger and bigger risks in pursuit of Mzu. This time they all manage to escape possession, but events are conspiring to draw them all to Nyvan, where the readers know Quinn is lurking and plotting his evil schemes.

As Joshua comes face to face with the possessed for the first time, the author takes a closer look at themes of religion and death. The possessed man that Joshua attempts to exorcise by calling on Christ simply laughs at him and explains that he is a Sunni Muslim. Joshua's belief is not enough to make the exorcism work, though a similar attempt had worked for Father Horst on Lalonde. This suggests two possibilities: either the exorcist must be a man with vested religious authority, or the possessed must believe in the god that is being prayed to. The latter would suggest that an atheist soul could not be exorcised. If so, then the exorcism seems to have less to do with a higher religious authority than with the individual soul's own fears and expectations. A religious Christian soul, upon hearing the exorcism spoken by a Christian priest, might expel itself from its captive body out of a deep-seated religious awe and fear. This does not negate the possibility that God or gods exist, but does perhaps suggest that no higher authority has a specific interest in keeping the souls of the deceased in the beyond.

This whole episode might also have a subtler point, to humorously poke fun at the fantasy and horror cliché of using Christian prayer to exorcise possessing spirits. Such clichés tend to present a Christian world-view as dominant without really considering other faiths or other gods. Examples include the 1973 film 'The Exorcist', the modern television show 'Supernatural', and any vampire story in which the monster is warded off with a cross. Here, Peter Hamilton seems to be asking: if prayer works through faith, what happens when the evil spirit simply does not believe in your god?

It is also intriguing that the possessed soul still refers to himself as a Muslim and talks passionately about his faith being the right one. This, along with other examples in the books, shows that many souls keep hold of their religious convictions despite the torment they have to endure in the beyond. To them, the beyond does not represent a godless universe in which no higher power cares for them, but an ordered universe in



which they are either being punished or undergoing a test. To many of them, rebirth into their new possessed bodies represents a form of salvation. This throws up some interesting questions. Is the beyond a form of purgatory in which souls are expected to atone for and learn from past mistakes? Many souls have spoken of how the souls in the beyond continually rip memories and experiences from each other, but this seems more a desperate attempt to connect with life again than some kind of learning experience. Perhaps the beyond is simply an intermediary stage that must be endured in order to understand or appreciate the next stage of existence. If so, why would souls return to sensory existence instead of 'moving on'? Perhaps there is nothing to move on to.

Joshua also considers the question that death poses to religion. He has just come to his own religious beliefs and immediately begins to question his faith. He wonders why God would create the beyond and condemn souls to suffer there. He feels that there must be an answer, believing that the universe is ordered and things do not happen without reason. Joshua concludes that humans will find the answers through looking for something more permanent. This suggests that Joshua has concluded that the beyond is an intermediary stage, a transitory place that souls are not meant to become trapped in. He realizes that however much they fight the possessed, they cannot win until they have answered these questions and solved the philosophical problems posed by the possessors and the beyond. Victory will come through searching for something for the souls to move on to, so that they will no longer suffer the beyond and crave life. Without that, the problem will only be delayed, as every living soul will eventually die and enter the beyond. Joshua might have turned religious, but he is still the same Joshua and faith will not be enough for him. He needs answers and practical solutions.

Joshua's close brush with death served to give him deeper religious convictions, which is one common response to near-death experiences. Another common response to death is the need to seek out human connections and comfort, especially sex. We see this response being played out all over Ayacucho as the frightened people gather in the bars and clubs. The party that Joshua attends with Voi's friends is full of sexual imagery and suggestions, including sensory recordings that stimulate the nerves into experiencing a kind of mock erotic encounter. The youth of Ayacucho are responding to the threat of the possessed in the only way they know how, by escaping into a semi-fantasy world of fun and sex.

Joshua comments on the more graphic elements of the erotic entertainment, observing with distaste that everything is about sex and the quick thrill with today's youth. In his day, the sensory recordings focused more on relationships, such as the excitement of first love or the joy of shared emotions. This is ironic, as Joshua himself is more about sex and quick thrills than the complicated feelings and sophisticated pleasures involved in adult relationships. Perhaps Joshua has been spoiled by the sensory recordings of his youth. He experienced fake relationships then, enjoying the thrill with none of the commitment, and now seems to have a deep aversion to anything that becomes too deep or involved.



Perhaps Joshua's distaste at this time for the sexual antics of Ayacucho's youth indicates how much he is changing. He realizes that his past sexual encounters have been meaningless and begins to wonder if he should be seeking something deeper. When he is at the party with the beautiful girl Kole, he cannot help comparing her and those around her to Louise. Louise is completely different from these girls, who are the type of rich, fun-seeking young women he normally finds himself attracted to. Compared to them, Louise's innocence is new and compelling. Joshua compares Louise's "simple honesty" with Kole's "absolute trash" (pg. 130.) Joshua finds that he cannot feel any respect for the girls who behave loosely, like himself, but that the virginal, innocent Louise is something special. This might explain why Lone is conspicuously missing from his thoughts. She has carefully hidden from him any traces of vulnerability, so he does not realize the extent of her feelings for him. To him, she is still a girl looking for a good time, a little bit too much like himself for comfort. Joshua seems blind to the fact that lone's complete trust in him speaks of much deeper feelings. Instead, he focuses on Louise, the girl who showed him innocent adoration. Ironically, Louise is actually beginning to lose a lot of this innocence and naiveté as she is forced to become independent to look after herself and her sister. When the two finally meet again, neither will be quite the same person as they were when they were together. When Louise and lone eventually find out that each is carrying Joshua's child, Joshua is going to have a lot of explaining to do and some difficult choices to make.

Joshua is not just changing in terms of romantic desire, but is also being forced to accept that he can no longer enjoy the kind of lone independence that he has always treasured. With the introduction of his brother, Joshua suddenly finds that he has new familial responsibilities to cope with. Joshua hates obligations and responsibility, preferring to think of himself as a lone wanderer, and so naturally fights the idea of having a brother that he must factor into his decisions. He reacts to Liol with suspicion, distrust, anger and resentment. The two argue over who has had it tougher in life, with Joshua refusing to admit that his own upbringing involved certain privileges that Liol never had, the biggest being the love and attention of his father. Joshua has always been a very solitary man, not liking anything to tie him down, and as a result resents having to share anything. He sees Liol as an outsider who is intruding on his life.

If Joshua could stop to think about what he will gain in Liol, perhaps he would not feel so resentful. Joshua's father is dead and he has no other family. With Liol he has someone to share life's problems and joys with, someone who could always be there for him and support him. After his close encounters with death, the chance to form such a connection should be something that Joshua relishes. Joshua finds himself thinking wistfully about Louise and considering how his relationships affect the women he has been with, but his reaction to Liol shows that he is not ready to settle down yet. Here he has a chance to embrace a brother and begin a family, but is immediately angry about the restrictions it will impose on him. Liol's intrusion into his life actually comes at the perfect time for Joshua. Unknown to him, he has two children by two separate women, who will soon become a very real responsibility in his life. Learning to accept, love and take responsibility for Liol will help him with his children in the future. Until now, Joshua has always wished to imitate the carefree lifestyle of his father, but the consequences of that lifestyle are only just beginning to make themselves apparent. Now Joshua begins





to see what his father's promiscuity has led to, and the readers know that Joshua's own consequences are catching up with him.

Liol's own reaction to Joshua is a little different. Liol has dreamt of the Lady Mac all his life. For him, the ship represents freedom and hope. This explains why Liol's initial reaction to Joshua is a little extreme. Approaching a new brother with lawyers and demands is probably not the best idea, but Liol's judgment was clouded by his desperation. Now Liol sees that Joshua loves the ship as much as he does, and realizes that Joshua is not a bad person. Liol is able to look beyond the inconvenience of Joshua's existence to realize that having a brother is a wonderful thing. Liol never had the benefit of knowing his father, and sees Joshua as a chance to create a new family bond that he craves. In these respects, Liol is a little less childish and hotheaded than Joshua, but in others the two are very similar. When Joshua complains about Liol to the lone-serjeant he calls him smarmy and lone remarks that there is little difference between them. Perhaps part of Joshua's dislike of Liol is that he sees his own personality reflected too clearly in him. Joshua can be quite a proud, even narcissistic, character, who is a little too pleased with himself all the time. He does not react with good grace to seeing a reflection of his own faults and failings in his brother.

Despite the initial antagonism, there are already hints of acceptance beneath the surface. Liol is amicable with Joshua and the crew, and Joshua does not even consider leaving Liol on the asteroid to be tortured by the possessed. Liol's charming nature is causing the crew to warm to him quickly. It is clear that having and knowing a brother is exactly what both men need at this time, whatever they might personally feel. This is clearly the first stage of a very interesting relationship that will develop throughout the book.

One more theme is touched on in chapter 4 that will become a very important theme throughout the book: revenge. Revenge is the motivating factor of several characters, including Alkad Mzu, Lodi and Voi, Dariat, Quinn, Bonney, and to a certain extent Erick. Here, the reader is given a deeper look into the hatred that permeates Garissan culture. This is the hatred that sparks Lodi, Voi and Mzu's quest for revenge. The Garissans on the Dorados asteroids are all survivors of the genocide of their world, brought about by Omuta. At the time, Omuta and Garissa were at war. Now the war is over and the few remaining Garissans are living on the Dorados with Confederation reparation money. Omuta was living under a weapons embargo until very recently. It has now been lifted, but the Omutans are left with no means of defending themselves. The Garissans do not consider any punishment of Omuta to be enough to make up for what was done to them.

Lodi comments on the need to keep hate alive in the younger generation, as no one should be allowed to forget the atrocity that was done to their people. Remembering atrocities so that they are not repeated is often considered an important function of history. However, how much can be gained by forcing younger generations to feel the same hate, fear and pain? If hate is encouraged, then nothing can ever be resolved and the people involved cannot mourn and move on with their lives. It seems unfair and unnecessary to inflict this legacy onto children who could otherwise grow up to resolve

their differences and encourage peace. Lodi and Voi's anger has encouraged them to seek revenge against Omuta, but this will certainly not solve the problem. This level of hatred and anger only lead to a cycle of revenge that sees atrocities repeated again and again. Lodi, Voi and Mzu are so blinded by their emotions that they cannot see that if they retaliate, they will be no better than the Omutans they hate so much.



# Chapter 5, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict

## Chapter 5, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Summary

Duchamp, Erick and the rest of the crew of the Villeneuve's Revenge arrive at Ethenthia, explaining that they are defectors from Capone. Erick reveals to the crew that he is a CNIS officer. He assures the crew that they will not be arrested if Duchamp tells him the coordinates of an antimatter station. Duchamp is angry but reluctantly complies. Erick is debriefed by the local CNIS and told that a voidhawk will soon arrive for him. In the meantime he should rest. Kingsley Pryor is arrested and taken to a secure cell.

As Erick waits for the voidhawk, he begins to notice glitches in the electronics and realizes that the possessed must be here too. He grabs two guards and they hurry to find a ship. When the group is attacked by the possessed, Erick abandons the guards, knowing that his information is more important. There are more possessed at the spaceport, so Erick finds an airlock and grabs a SII suit, a piece of clothing that will protect him from the vacuum of space. He then jettisons himself out into space. Slowly, he drifts towards a maintenance bay and finds a starship inside. The ship is in very bad repair, but it is his only hope. He takes the ship and jumps away.

Meanwhile, the possessed on Ethenthia have freed Kingsley Pryor from his cell. Kingsley goes straight to the Villeneuve's Revenge and demands that Duchamp fly him away. Duchamp refuses, but Kingsley informs him that there is another bomb on board the ship. Kingsley claims that he had always intended them to escape Capone, and that there had always been two bombs on the ship.

Gerald Skibbow has managed to make his way to the asteroid Koblat, hoping to find a ship there that will take him to Valisk. He is walking down a corridor when he hears Beth scream. She is being threatened by three men. Gerald thinks of Marie and forces himself to help, brandishing a nervejam stick at the men. Beth takes Gerald to the other Deadnight kids. He overhears them talking about Valisk and agrees to pay for the trip to take them there.

Syrinx has returned from visiting the Kiint to her mother's house on Romulus, an Edenist habitat. She and her mother, Athene, talk about death and religion, and what the implications of possession mean for Edenism.

Prince Noton and a delegation from the Kulu Kingdom visit Tranquillity to ask if Lone will let them use Tranquillity serjeants to help liberate Mortonridge from the possessed. She agrees. When the delegation has left with its answer, Lone is informed that a Laymil sense recording of the suicide has been discovered. The Laymil were an alien race who committed suicide when faced with their own possessed problem. Lone watches the



recording, which suggests that the Laymil considered their suicide a victory against the possessed. For some reason they were not afraid of death and the beyond.

## Chapter 5, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Analysis

Chapter 5 explores themes of death and religion further, as Syrinx and Athene discuss what the implications of possession and the beyond might mean for Edenism, and for humanity. They talk about what the purpose of the beyond might be, and why some souls appear to get trapped while others do not. The Edenist Laton seemed pretty certain that he would not remain in the beyond. He faced death with optimism, describing it as the next stage of the journey. He also suggested that no Edenist need fear death. Syrinx and Athene wonder why that might be so. Athene poses that perhaps good souls are allowed to move on, whereas bad souls are punished. Syrinx is surprised that her mother would think along such religious lines. She is not sure that morality is the answer, but she also wonders if there is a god. The truths of death, possession and the beyond are forcing the Edenists, normally so secure in their atheistic beliefs, to begin to question deeply-held convictions.

Although it is Athene who suggests a moral purpose behind the beyond, she is not as willing as Syrinx to accept the possibilities of the existence of God. Syrinx, uncharacteristically for an Edenist, has begun to use the expletive 'Jesus,' as many Adamist characters throughout the book do. She has most likely picked this up from Joshua, who has made a surprisingly big impact on her for the brief times they have met. Perhaps Syrinx finds herself unwillingly attracted to the side of Joshua that represents everything an Edenist is not. He is a complete individual, who dislikes any responsibility or ties. He thinks for himself and acts for himself, happy being a lone wanderer. He bends the rules when he likes, driven by his own moral code rather than one society has laid down for him. This form of freedom is one that an Edenist, continually connected to everyone else in their society, could never have or understand. However, Joshua is not that different from Syrinx either. Both were born for space. Neither of them is ever entirely at home on a planet but only free and happy when wandering the stars. Though Joshua is not linked to his ship in the same way as Syrinx is to Oenone, he still treasures her over everything else, and almost thinks of her as a part of himself. In a sense, Joshua is who Syrinx might be if she were an Adamist. Syrinx is fascinated with the Adamist cultures that she has been brought up to disapprove of. Perhaps for her, Joshua represents everything that is so mysterious, intriguing, different and dangerous about the Adamists. Syrinx's attraction to Joshua can in this way be seen as symbolic of her attraction to the ideas that lie outside of Edenism. Syrinx is not content to accept what the rest of her society think without questioning other ways of looking at the universe.

In response to Syrinx's religious questions, Athene reiterates the view of Wing-Tsit Chong that Syrinx is a 'tourist.' According to them, Syrinx does not like to visit new ideas or places herself, or to enter unexplored or alien territory, but likes to dip in and out of what other people have already discovered or thought. Athene suggests that Syrinx is



susceptible to religion because she is a tourist of knowledge, happy to explore others' suggested answers to the complicated problems, but too afraid to decide for herself. This is an unfair assessment. Syrinx seems more willing to explore difficult questions and their answers than the other Edenists. Most Edenists look down on religion too much to give it consequence, but Syrinx is approaching it with more of an open mind. Religions have had to ponder the big questions for thousands of years, such as the nature of death, the existence of an afterlife, whether there is design in the universe, and what the purpose of it all might be. It seems natural that religion would therefore be a good starting point for forming one's own opinions. It would seem the worst kind of arrogance to simply reject these theories out of hand. Perhaps it is the other Edenists, not Syrinx, who are too afraid to seek their own knowledge. They remain comfortable in the convictions and beliefs that have been passed down through their collective culture, not willing to question or change.

Athene and Syrinx's discussion takes place in Athene's garden, which can be seen as a metaphor for the universe, and for the questions that they both have concerning it. Syrinx comments that the garden is overgrown and no longer ordered, and that Athene should get it seen to. Athene laughs and suggests leaving it to nature, but Syrinx points out that habitats are not natural. Just like the garden, the universe once made sense and has now been thrown into chaos. Ironically, for the Edenists the universe seemed more controlled when they assumed it had no order to it. Now that it seems there might be a higher purpose, even a god, the universe seems chaotic. However, like the garden, the universe might seem to be chaotic when it is actually guided by a controlling presence. In the case of the garden, it is the habitat personality that controls its growth. For the universe, it may be a god or gods. For both, there is an underlying order beneath the illusion of disorder. Nothing about the habitat garden is natural, yet what could be more natural than a garden? In this way, the garden is also a metaphor for the search for god. Many religious people come to God because they sense an underlying order to the universe. In fact, this is the exact reason that Joshua gave for his new religious convictions.

Through Syrinx and Athene's short comments about the garden, the reader can also gain a great insight into their hopes and fears for the universe. Athene wants to leave the garden to nature, to see how chaos will shape it once she has stopped trying to impose order. This is how she feels about the possessed and the beyond. She is frightened, but also accepting. She will see what happens and accept whatever the result might be, hoping that she might appreciate the beauty of the situation whether she understands it or not. She realizes that the old Edenist convictions must change, so she no longer wishes to try to impose order or beliefs on a universe that will not accept them. Syrinx, on the other hand, cannot leave things to fate. She wants answers, and she wants to believe that the universe is still ordered and that it can be understood. She also has the ability to look deeper into a situation than her mother does. She can see beyond the chaos of the garden to the guiding personality beneath it. She wonders if the universe might be the same. She is much more willing to question what she has been taught and to look for answers beyond the obvious. Athene thinks Syrinx's willingness to embrace religion is a weakness, but is it instead her strength?



The suicide of the Laymil and their spaceholms or habitats provides a different approach to looking at these themes. The suicide is constantly described in bittersweet, yet beautiful and triumphant terms. The Laymil, it seems, were both sorrowful and triumphant in their death. They did not look on the suicide as a surrender or failure, but rather as a victory. The description of their last memories is also filled with religious language. One Laymil instructs his children to "join into rapture" and reassures them that "eternal exultation awaits strong" (pg. 175.) This seems to suggest that the Laymil discovered the answers behind possession and the beyond, and that it did not make them lose faith or give in to despair. Nor did they fear the beyond. They must have found some way to escape torment in the beyond or they would not have looked at their suicide in such triumphant terms. The religious element to the suicides also suggests that they have seen order or a higher power in the universe. Perhaps, for them, the answer to defeating the possessed lay in facing death without fear, as the Laymil told his child that exultation would await the strong. Perhaps they understood what the next stage of the journey was, as Laton described it, and so could give up their former lives with only a little regret. The triumphant nature of the Laymil suicide certainly suggests that the answer to defeating the possessed does not lie in conflict and physical strength but in philosophy and deeper truths.

If so, then all attempts to fight the possessed are ultimately pointless. Lone certainly seems to think that the plans to liberate Mortonridge are foolhardy. She is at first reluctant to grant Prince Noton her help, but Tranquillity persuades her otherwise. War, it seems, is about more than just fighting, and Lone must be concerned with the politics that lie behind it. Liberating Mortonridge would offer hope to the people that the possessed can be beaten. However false that hope may be, the reassurance it will offer will make everyone's lives easier while real methods of dealing with the possessed are researched. More importantly, Lone cannot turn down an offer of friendship and trust from the Kulu Kingdom, who have until now been on strained relations with her. Any course of action that will form a bond between different cultures must be pursued for the sake of a better future, when or if the possessed should be beaten. It is ironic that in order to create a sense of achievement, to keep up morale and forge relationships of trust and respect, so many would have to die, perhaps needlessly. Lone is getting her first taste of the politics that lie behind war and is not happy with what she sees.

Chapter 5 does not just deal with big themes, but also delves a little deeper into how events are affecting some of the characters. Erick, as we have seen, has made a long journey from naiveté and idealism to acceptance of the compromises inherent in his job. This is shown best by his actions in this chapter. Finally, Erick has the chance to bring the man he hates, Duchamp, to justice. Instead of arresting him, however, he allows him to make a deal. Erick has fought the possessed face to face and knows all too well the horrors that threaten humanity. Even he has to admit that the possessed represent a worse enemy than Duchamp. By acquiring the coordinates to the antimatter base, Erick will help to ensure many lives are saved. In the end, Erick is able to put the importance of human life over his need for justice and revenge. Erick's compromises do not end here though. He is also forced to abandon two men in his flight from the possessed. Erick knows that his information is more important than their lives. This time he is forced to factor in the greater amount of lives, and the greater benefit, for the smaller sacrifice.



That Erick is even able to make this decision so quickly shows how far he has come and how much he has changed. He does not make the decisions lightly, however, as we can see when his thoughts turn once again to Tina, the first victim of the need to compromise for a greater good. Every time Erick is forced into these kinds of actions, it weighs on him a little more. Just as his self-respect and idealism falls apart, so does his body. He is now covered in injuries and med-packs. The reader wonders how much longer he can hold together, both physically and mentally.

Gerald Skibbow is also not coping well. He is barely managing to hold himself together to carry out his plans. The horrors he experienced through being possessed have traumatized him and made him terrified of any form of violence or conflict. He sees shadows and threats everywhere. Having been possessed seems to have left him with some kind of link to the beyond. He can feel the presence of the tormented souls, forever there, always around him. Now, any conflict, pain, or unhappiness brings back memories of the possession. When the soul took over his body, Gerald was helpless to act, being forced to watch the atrocities his body was committing. Now he must feel a certain disconnection with that body, and seems to find it hard to manage being in control of it once more. Gerald only seems able to function when being helped and guided by another, first by his wife, now by Beth. The only connection Gerald has to the living world anymore is through his daughter Marie. Freeing her from possession has become his obsession, his one purpose. If he succeeds, this will be his atonement for past failures, for which he feels an enormous amount of grief and guilt. Saving Marie will be his salvation.

Beth reacts to Gerald first with pity, then with a kind of fierce affection. She protects him, and in return he provides her with something she has missed and craved all her life: a fatherly figure. This is Beth's motivation for joining the Deadnights and trying to get to Valisk. She sees the society that Kiera offers as a chance to gain the appreciation, love and concern that are so lacking from her life. Although the reader is never told Beth's family situation, it is clear from her longing for affection, the lack of any parental figures, and her latching on to Gerald that she has no real family to speak of. Gerald changes Beth's outlook by offering her someone who needs her, who she can offer her affection and loyalty to without being rejected, as Jed seems to have rejected her in his obsession with Kiera.

Through the added responsibility of protecting Gerald, Beth has been forced to harden, displaying a much tougher and more practical attitude to the problems the Deadnights face. She will certainly take no nonsense from Jed's half-sister and makes this abundantly clear. Jed, on the other hand, is softening. His idea of what life with Kiera will be like has forced him to question his values. If he wants a world in which everyone treats each other with love and respect, then he must begin to live up to those ideals. He worries that he will somehow not be worthy of Kiera if he does not. Whereas for Beth the Deadnight cause is about escaping to a better place, for Jed it has almost become a religion, and he changes his behavior accordingly. Ironically, as Jed begins to take down the walls that he has built around himself all his life, Beth begins to build her own walls up. Jed might be an idealist and Beth a more practical person, but both stand out in this chapter for what they really are: lost, desperate children.

Finally, chapter 5 alludes to the disappearance of Tranquillity at the end of the book by giving the reader a cryptic hint that Tranquillity is not a normal habitat. A mysterious reference to Tranquillity's true capabilities leaves the reader wondering what the habitat's great secret is, and what this will have to do with the possessed.





# Chapter 6, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict

## Chapter 6, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Summary

At Valisk, Rubra notices Bonney, one of the possessed, getting close to one of the few remaining living humans in the habitat. He quickly wakes the living man and guides him to safety. He then offers Bonney a better victim: Dariat. Bonney is suspicious, but Rubra convinces her that they both want Dariat dead. After leading Bonney to him, Rubra contacts Dariat to tell him that the possessed are closing in on him. Dariat sees that he is right and accepts Rubra's help to evade Bonney. Rubra then leads Dariat to a room where he meets Tatiana, his dead lover Anastasia's little sister, who is now middle-aged and hiding out from the possessed.

Things are not going well for Al Capone. Voidhawks are hounding his fleet at Arnstadt with guerrilla tactics that have taken the Organization by surprise. On top of that, they are finding it hard to keep the population of Kursk under control. Al decides to abandon Kursk, and proceed with their plans to attack Toi-Hoi. When he returns upstairs, Jezzibella suggests forming an alliance with Kiera, the possessed leader at Valisk, and Al agrees.

Admiral Aleksandrovich is informed that the Kulu Kingdom wishes Confederation help in removing the possessed from Mortonridge on Ombey. He does not think that this is a good use of resources but is forced to agree. Like other leaders before him, the Admiral realizes that the opportunity to forge ties of friendship and trust between the different governments is too important to pass up.

In Dr. Gilmore's lab, Jacqueline Couteur, the possessed soul the Confederation Navy is studying, asks for a lawyer. Dr. Gilmore promises to take her request higher if she will answer some questions. She agrees, and he finds out that she was conscious during her entire experience in the beyond. He reveals that this knowledge means that the beyond and the souls within it are subject to change. If this is the case, he says, then it means that they can be killed.

Syrinx and Oenone arrive at Golomo, where they are just in time to hear a message from Erick Thakrar calling for help. He says that he is heading for a nearby colony, but that his ship is in bad shape. Concerned that Erick's ship may not have made the jump safely, Syrinx travels to the coordinates to find him. Meanwhile, Erick's ship has made it to the Ngeuni system, but breaks down and falls apart on arrival. The life-support capsule jettisons with Erick inside.



## Chapter 6, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Analysis

In Chapter 6, the reader is given a much closer look at the habitat of Valisk, and the personalities of Dariat and Rubra. Ironically, in his reaction to the possessed, Rubra comes across much less callous than other leaders. Even the Edenists claim that they cannot stop the hellhawks, possessed and mutated living ships, from bringing new victims to Kiera. They point out that the situation is not serious enough to warrant action anyway. In fact, picking up Deadnight kids is a good distraction for the hellhawks, who could otherwise be put to much more sinister use and really cause trouble for the Confederation or the Edenists. Rubra comments on how the Edenists, normally so respectful of life, now seem happy to make morally reprehensible compromises when their own interests are threatened. Other leaders in the book have reacted to the possessed by worrying about political implications of various actions, weighing up the 'worth' of combating the possessed without really stopping to think about the individual lives involved. Rubra seems to be the only one concerned about the people he is supposed to protect. This is ironic, as Rubra is a rebel who broke away from the Edenist culture, and has largely been regarded as a selfish, arrogant, roguish character. His personality in the first books certainly came across as particularly ruthless. Now Rubra goes to extreme efforts to protect every single life he can from the possessed, something no other government seems willing to do.

We do wonder, however, if Rubra's intentions are entirely altruistic. Although Rubra feels some sense of responsibility for the people living within the habitat, he is also driven by feelings of pride. Rubra feels an enormous sense of satisfaction from being able to protect his people from the possessed, enjoying thwarting them whenever possible. It has almost become a game for him, guiding the living to safety, picking off the possessed in whatever ways he can, devising means to secretly spy on them, and so on. This game is a chance for Rubra to prove himself, to show that he is more powerful and intelligent than the arrogant souls who believe they can take over the habitat so easily. Rubra also feels pride for the living who have managed to evade the possessed for this long, as these are the people who have trusted and followed him. Through this crisis, Rubra is gaining a connection with his people that he never previously experienced, and beginning to understand his purpose as their protecting habitat personality. When Rubra broke away from the Edenists so long ago, he gained a sense of individuality that he could never have known with the Edenists. Perhaps it is this sense of individuality and appreciation for each separate, different person that has led Rubra to act and feel as he does now. The Edenists, by contrast, can never value one person over the many, and their decisions are based entirely on the greatest good for Edenism as a whole.

The landscape of Valisk is a reflection of the personality of Rubra. It is hard and savage, not like the carefully cultivated and arranged gardens of an Edenist habitat. Valisk's landscape is a desert: barren and harsh, but real. Whereas there is something that feels false about the managed vegetation of Edenism, a desert seems somehow more connected with reality. It has no frills or pretensions, and a person needs to be tough



and resourceful to survive there. The desert seems like a rejection and antithesis of everything that represents the soft, peaceful homes of the Edenists. This is symbolic of all Rubra's feelings about Edenism and its beliefs and values. However, a desert can be beautiful too. Dariat admires the beauty in the scenery, encapsulated in a sense of wild freedom. All beauty in a desert has pushed its own way through the harsh soil, rather than been helped and coerced by a gardener. In the same way, the pleasant and beautiful aspects of the culture and people living in Valisk are all the more wonderful because they have not been molded into what they are by Edenism's collective conscience. Life in Valisk might seem less safe, less immediately pleasant than Edenist culture, but it also seems freer.

This brings up the question of whether Edenism really is the perfect society that it at first seems. When Syrinx and Oenone pick up Erick, Syrinx comments on how ridiculous Adamists are for their extreme reactions and emotions. She looks down on them, and laments that they cannot link minds and share burdens as an Edenist would. This is a typical Edenist reaction to behavior that they do not understand. Edenists all seem to share a great sense of superiority over others, safe in the knowledge that their society represents an ideal civilization. Do they have a point? Edenist society has very little crime, and no psychotic or damaged people. Everyone is balanced and happy, as their shared consciousness never allows anyone to feel too sad, afraid or alone. The Edenists also often seem to be more logical and sensible than the Adamists, perhaps again because of their shared beliefs and values. Each individual Adamist thinks in his own way, reacts to situations in his own unique way, and forms his own moral codes. Edenists inherit the decisions and reactions of their society, molded by a habitat personality and by each other from birth. This means that they can think through problems as an entire group consciousness, allowing them to arrive at sensible conclusions that it would take Adamists much longer to discuss and debate. It also means that Edenists tend to react, think and feel the same as other Edenists. It is small wonder, in this society, that criminal behavior is non-existent. Any action harmful to another Edenist is also harmful to oneself. This, however, does not necessarily seem like a very free society. If Edenists are molded from birth, does that mean that they are essentially brainwashed? Is any Edenist free to think for himself or herself, or do they simply spout the opinions of the group consciousness? In a society where everyone tends to think and react the same, is much, if any, individuality retained? Is individuality the root of conflict? If so, would peace be worth the price of sacrificing it?

Dariat's character is explored a little further in chapter 6, again bringing up the important theme of revenge. Dariat is entirely driven by his need for revenge against Rubra, even seeing the possessed and everything else that happens as a channel or means for this desire. Dariat's hatred has blinded him to the fact that the possessed represent a worse threat than Rubra ever could, and that his efforts would be better focused on helping Rubra to drive them out. He is also blind to the obvious fact that Anastasia herself would never want Dariat to take revenge for her death. She championed love, acceptance and peace, and made it her mission to save Dariat from Anstid. Anstid is a personification of hate, fear and other damaging emotions that the starbridge tribes believe in. Anastasia passed this belief on to Dariat, and now he has clung on to it fiercely as a justification of his actions. To him, Rubra is Anstid, and he must defeat Rubra in order to escape the



clutches of the evil god. Dariat does not see that in his hatred and pursuit of revenge, he is giving in to this idea of Anstid. If he were to let go, forget and forgive, then he would truly break from Anstid's power. Dariat is only dishonoring the memory of Anastasia by behaving in this way. Is Dariat his own Anstid? Perhaps Anstid, symbolic of damaging emotions and behavior, only exists within.

Revenge is a purpose that allows for no other emotion than hate. When Dariat is led to Tatiana, he is suddenly forced to feel other emotions. He feels sorrow for the loss of Anastasia, guilt for failing her before, and a new determination not to fail her again. He now sees Tatiana's safety as his main responsibility. Revenge can no longer be his only motivator. Rubra has cleverly guided Dariat to the one thing that might cool his hatred and force him into an alliance with his old enemy.

In chapter 6 the reader is also given a closer look at how Al Capone and his Organization are holding up against opposition. Al Capone is shown as a character completely out of his time. He is finding it very hard to adapt to the modern world and its concepts and values. Capone lived in a time before weapons of such extreme destruction were invented, and so does not understand the terror that people attach to antimatter. He also has never experienced guerrilla tactics, and so is taken entirely by surprise when the voidhawks use sneak attacks to hound his forces. For Al, this is a cowardly way to fight. He is used to simple conflict and does not understand how modern warfare works. Al's feelings towards his troubles, and a sense of homesickness for the past, is shown in the boxing ring that he constructs in the basement. He retires to the ring to watch simple fights, in which two men throw punches at each other and the stronger wins. This is how he wishes his own fights could be, instead of the sneaking and politics involved in modern conflict.

Jezzibella, however, does understand how the modern world works, especially the sneaky deals and politics that must be made to succeed. She is a woman who is used to being able to manipulate any situation to her advantage, as she has done so expertly with Capone. She advises him to seek an alliance with Kiera, pulling in another player that she hopes she can manipulate to gain even more power. As Jezzibella watches Capone from her cameras and carefully pushes him in certain directions, it seems that she is the real power behind the scenes. There is no doubt left in the reader's mind who is really in control in her relationship with Capone. Jezzibella expertly acts the part of the supportive advisor, the woman who is dedicated to her man, and Al is never suspicious. The reader, however, knows that Jezzibella has made a career out of faking just about everything. She is a professional at using emotions and fabricating different personalities. Even Jezzibella's name is symbolic of her character. Jezebel was a woman in the Bible who seduced Samson to his doom. Jezebel has now become the name attached to dangerous women who use their sexuality to get what they want. In the same way, Jezzibella soothes and fools Capone with her sexuality, while manipulating everything that he does. The reader wonders whose side Jezzibella is really on, or whether she can ever have any side other than her own. Is she simply an opportunist trying to keep herself in power? It seems unlikely that Jezzibella would be happy to wield her power from behind the scenes forever. Will Jezzibella turn on



Capone, and what are her ultimate aims? Who is the real Jezebel? The reader cannot ever be completely sure.

Lastly, chapter 6 provides an interesting development in Dr. Gilmore's research. Dr. Gilmore discovers that the beyond and the dead are subject to entropy. This means that the souls in the beyond can change, such as experiencing the passage of time. If the beyond and the souls within it can be altered, then they can be killed. This not only represents hope for the living, it also suggests that the beyond is not a permanent stage in which souls are meant to remain. This revelation seems to back up the view that the beyond is an intermediary stage in which souls are not meant to become trapped. If the beyond can be changed, perhaps it can also be altered in a way that will help all souls to 'move on.'



# Chapter 7, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict

## Chapter 7, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Summary

Quinn Dexter has now taken over the whole asteroid Jesup. While supervising the placing of a fusion bomb, he senses a strange presence and decides to go in search of it. He senses a chink in reality and pushes through to find a group of souls. He tries to touch one, but it recoils in pain. The souls tell Quinn that they are ghosts.

Louise, Genevieve and Fletcher arrive at Phobos, Mars' moon. They shop for clothes and supplies, find a ship bound for Earth, and buy tickets. Endron takes them to get fake passports created, but Fletcher glitches the machines carrying out the full body scan and they realize that he is possessed. Louise tries to explain to Endron that Fletcher is not a threat. Endron is reluctantly persuaded to help them, and agrees to finish making their fake passports.

When Organization ships arrive at Valisk, Rubra manages to infiltrate Kiera's private meeting room by using small bitek insects, creatures that have been grown to share a mind-link with him. Capone's representative, Patricia, offers to give Kiera antimatter if she will send hellhawks to Capone. Capone will use the ships to combat the voidhawks that have been causing him so much trouble. Kiera can use the antimatter to blow up the nearby planet Srinagar's SD network or planetary defenses. Her people can then possess the planet, allowing them to leave Valisk and the problem of Rubra behind. Kiera says she needs to talk to Capone face to face, and prepares to leave. In the meantime, she says, Bonney should seek out Dariat and kill him. The voidhawks tell Rubra that they do not have the power to stop the Organization ships leaving with Kiera. Rubra realizes that his time to bring Dariat over to his side to defeat the possessed is running out.

Syrinx and her crew have been searching for Erick, and at last manage to find his life-pod. They hurry Erick back to Oenone, where they set about trying to heal his many wounds. Erick wakes up and demands that they stop, threatening them with a nerve burst implant that will kill the doctor. He begs to be put into stasis in zero-tau and taken to an Edenist world to be kept there safely. He believes that only the Edenists can resist the possessed, and knows that in zero-tau he will be safe from both death and possession. In return, he will give them the coordinates of the antimatter station that he acquired from Duchamp. Syrinx agrees, but makes him promise that when the possessed have been beaten she can open his zero-tau pod and awaken him. He agrees, but does not believe it will ever happen.



The possessed in Mortonridge on the planet Ombey are still trying to help transport living children to safety. Now their numbers have grown to four vehicles, eight possessed adults and nearly sixty children.

## Chapter 7, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Analysis

Chapter 7 is a very important chapter for the exploration of both character and theme. Many of the main characters are reaching crisis points or having to resolve their feelings and emotions. This inevitably leads to discussions surrounding death, religion, conflict, and how people can live together peaceably.

Quinn Dexter expresses surprise at the fact that the possessed can still hold on to past religious beliefs that have clearly been proven false by the existence of the beyond. He does not see that this is exactly what he is doing. He interprets the beyond, and the torment that souls suffer there, as proof of the existence of his dark, evil deity. The other possessed have interpreted things differently, seeing the beyond as a form of purgatory or punishment, and their return from it as salvation. Religions, in part, exist as different interpretations of the world, and faith can be a hard thing to break. Quinn finds it frustrating when people and souls express belief in other gods, yet he frequently refers to his own as 'God's Brother.' His deity is actually defined by the fact that it exists in tandem with another deity, God. When Quinn talks of the 'false God' of other faiths, then, he is forgetting that the theology on which his own religion rests seems to admit the existence of at least one other god.

Quinn talks of preparing the world for Lucifer's coming, "to build the temples and prepare the sacrament" (pg. 231-232.) He is perverting religious concepts of purity and hope to fit his dark religion. His temples will not be buildings of worship but symbolic temples of pain brought about through cruelty and destruction. If a temple is a place to give praise to God, then Quinn will create temples to Lucifer by forcing people to give in to their fear and hatred. A sacrament is a ceremony or symbol of faith. In Christianity, sacraments include baptism and communion. Quinn's sacraments will be based on pain and suffering, initiating people into his cult through torture and the encouragement of violence. Quinn's religion, the worship of the Christian Devil, is a subversion and mockery of Christianity, right down to the inverted cross that its followers wear. The inverted cross or Petrine Cross is actually a Christian symbol representing Saint Peter who was crucified upside-down, but it has been adopted by some Satanists and is now often associated with the Devil. It is feasible that by Quinn's time this symbol could become the official sign of Satanism. The symbol is significant because it shows that Quinn's cult is not a separate religion, but a perversion and mockery of Christianity. Even its official mark is simply an adapted symbol of Christianity. Satanism relies on Christianity in a way that Quinn resents, yet cannot get away from, as all his own attempts to worship Lucifer are corrupted forms of Christian ideas. This perhaps explains his extreme detestation of all those who follow major religions and whose faith cannot be shaken. Quinn has a strong inferiority complex that causes him to react so



violently to opposition, such as when he believes the invisible presence to be mocking him. This inferiority complex seems to extend to his religious beliefs.

Chapter 7 is the first introduction of ghosts into the 'Night's Dawn' universe. There is now a whole new aspect to death to be considered. The reader wonders where ghosts come from and why they are here. We are already wondering why some souls appear to move on while others become trapped in the beyond. Now it would appear that some souls do not even make it as far as the beyond, but remain trapped, weak and helpless, in the place where they died. Whereas the possessed souls tend to express anger, fear, resentment, and conflicted emotions on returning to life, the ghosts are sad, vulnerable and terrified. There now appears to be a hierarchy of the dead forming, with the most fearful and vulnerable at the bottom. Perhaps the author is suggesting that it is a buildup of unbalanced emotions such as fear and hate that holds souls in the beyond, or in the ghost world for those too terrified to even face the beyond. This would certainly explain why the more balanced and less fearful Edenists find it easier to move on.

The reader also wonders what the nature of the ghostly plane of existence is, since Quinn has obviously stepped into another dimension or universe in order to perceive the ghosts. When Quinn touches one of the ghosts it feels pain. Is this because of Quinn's power as a possessor, or is it the contact of life and change that hurts the dead? If Quinn can push through into their dimension, can they push through into his? The many ghost stories that humans tell of ghosts interacting with the living would seem to suggest so.

Chapter 7 also shows the changes that have been taking place in Louise since she has left Norfolk. Louise is losing a lot of her innocence and naiveté. In short, she is growing up. Genevieve is reacting to her pain, fear and frustration by indulging in childish behavior, while Louise focuses more on practical concerns. During their shopping trip, Genevieve buys games and Louise buys supplies. The most treasured item that Louise acquires is a piece of equipment that will monitor her health. It is telling that she is particularly pleased with this, out of all the clothes, jewelry, modern trinkets and items of convenience that she now has access to. The device will allow her to keep track of her own health and her baby's, giving her greater independence and control over her life. These are freedoms that Louise has come to value over everything else, as they are so vital to her survival. She is now responsible for herself, her baby and her little sister, with no parents to protect or coddle her. Although Fletcher is helping them, he will soon be pursuing his own goals on Earth and she will only have herself to rely on. This situation has forced Louise to grow up and to be practical. She is now a much braver, confident and independent person than she was when she left Norfolk. Her loss of naiveté is shown most clearly in her recognition that Joshua is not a prince or a hero. She acknowledges that he is not perfect, but does not give up or despair. She still thinks that he will make a good father. The reader wonders what will happen when this new, strong-minded Louise meets Joshua again. Perhaps she will feel that he is no longer worthy of her.

However, though Louise is growing stronger and more confident, she is also afraid. She cannot show her fear to her sister, but secretly she longs for something safe and





nurturing. She loves the plants on Phobos, particularly the trees, which represent age and stability to her. They make the world seem more real, more like home for her, but they also represent something solid and lasting. Louise has been racing around all over the galaxy since she began her escape from the possessed. She is constantly moving, always running away or trying to reach somewhere, and must long for the comfort of a permanent home. She is very wistful to leave the beautiful trees of Phobos, as they are the first things she has seen that remind her of a stable home. Genevieve, meanwhile, copes with her own fears and homesickness by throwing herself into games. In games, she can submerge into a fantasy world in which there are no possessed and where all violence is fake and reversible. She can be the hero and save the day. In games she does not have to feel so helpless.

Fletcher is coping with his own homesickness by trying not to dwell on it. He could look up information about his old life and what became of his family, but he does not want to have to cope with the pain and grief that this would bring. Instead, he focuses all his efforts on helping Louise and Genevieve, forming a new family to love and protect. Fletcher's history includes betrayal and shame. Fletcher Christian is actually a real historical individual who led a mutiny on the ship *Bounty* in 1789, before settling on islands in the Pacific Ocean near Australia and New Zealand. A mutiny was seen as a particularly disgraceful and treacherous action for any man to carry out. It is likely that Fletcher feels great shame and sadness, even though he felt forced into that course of action at the time and may still believe it was the right thing to do. Fletcher, in this book, comes across as an essentially honest and decent man who feels great remorse for breaking his code of honor long ago. His fierce protection of Louise and Genevieve, as well as his resolve to save Earth and stop Quinn, are probably his attempts to redeem himself and make up for past shame. It is interesting that one of the Pacific islands where Fletcher's descendents grew up is called Norfolk, the same name as Louise and Genevieve's planet. The planet Norfolk can therefore be read as a symbol of Fletcher's legacy. This time around, he will make sure his actions leave consequences that he can be proud of.

Dariat is also given a second chance in this chapter. Now that he has Tatiana to look after, he finds that he must reassess his life and his goals. He has something of an epiphany, concluding that hatred and misfortune in the world are necessary, as without them one could never know the sweetness of love. In admitting this, Dariat is acknowledging that his philosophical war against Anstid is nonsensical. Killing Rubra will not end the existence of evil. He knows that Rubra is not Anstid, and that Anstid can never be fought in a physical sense anyway. Anstid, as a representation of destructive thoughts, emotions and actions, is simply a part of life. He admits that it is simply revenge against Rubra that he wants, but he is now able to place his need for revenge below other concerns. By taking Tatiana's safety on as his new purpose, he has made the first step in letting go of all the hate and anger that he has carried around for so long.

Whereas Louise and Dariat are going through positive changes, Erick has completely broken down. The guilt and disgust that Erick carries around for the compromises he has had to make, especially the death of Tina, weigh on him as much as his fear of the



possessed and his feelings of helplessness. His mental deterioration seems to be reflected in his physical deterioration, with each new scar symbolic of another compromise or terror endured. Erick has been quickly reaching the limit of what he can bear. He has seen evil on two levels, from the petty selfishness of Duchamp to the merciless violence of the possessed. Both have caused death and pain for so many, and Erick has so far completely failed to bring either to justice. For Erick, life is almost as intolerable as death, yet he fears death more than anything else. In death, Erick will not only have to face Tina again, he will also become the enemy that he hates so much. Erick sees himself faced with two terrible options: the threat of possession or death if he stays alive, or eternal suffering and a betrayal of his values if he dies. His solution is to place himself into zero-tau. This will protect him from all three evils of life, death and possession. He would rather face the oblivion of eternal sleep than risk any other outcome. In this, he shares the pessimistic despair of Kelly Tirrel, the reporter who faced the possessed on Lalonde. They have both chosen a path that they see as the end of their suffering.

Syrinx's reaction to Erick's suffering and despair is one of both pity and anger, as she resents the fact that Adamists cannot link their minds to share their pain. No Edenist would end up like Erick or Kelly, trapped inside their own head and forced to suffer alone. Edenists, by sharing their thoughts and feelings, can offer mass comfort and relief that leads to very balanced individuals. Whereas previously the Edenists might have seemed a little aloof and superior, we now begin to see the huge advantages of their group consciousness. It is also easy to see how a soul such as Erick's might become trapped in the beyond through his own fear and agonizing emotions, but that an Edenist's calmer, more rational soul would be better able to move on. Is this the reason why Edenists stand a greater chance of conquering death than their Adamist cousins?

If Edenists have managed to avoid conflict through the creation of a mass consciousness, then perhaps another route is offered by the Martians. On Phobos, Endron explains the philosophy and values of his society to Louise. Martian society is built on communist principles, something that has bad associations for Louise. Endron explains that the reason why the communists on her world have not been successful is that they have tried to force an ideology on people who do not accept it. He says that this is an evil that should never be carried out, as people cannot be forced to believe what they do not want to believe, or to accept values that they do not agree with. Communism, then, which seems to be the perfect society on Phobos and Mars, would not necessarily work in other places. Rather than try to fight this, people should accept their differences instead. He explains that if any ethnic nationhood is to survive, then it must be open to change. A static society will fragment, which will eventually lead to conflict. People should therefore not be afraid of change. Endron's perfect society, then, does not follow any specific laws or tenets. Instead, it is a society in which change is allowed to evolve naturally and differences of opinion are not fought over. In theory, this sounds like a very sensible idea, and would certainly be a successful route to avoiding conflict. However, the reader is forced to wonder if his high ideals are possible. If Endron believes in communism, as he says he does, can he really be content to let tomorrow's youth choose a different economic system for themselves? He claims that people should not fear change and simply let it happen, but shouldn't a person also



stand up for his beliefs and the values he holds dear? Will the Martians be so willing to accept change if it means being possessed? When does conflict become morally acceptable? Endron's high ideals might at first seem sensible, but they are impossible to live up to. Out of the two systems for avoiding conflict, Edenism seems much more sustainable.

Finally, chapter 7 takes a deeper look at the morality of possession and the future of the possessed. Stephanie, Moyo and the other possessed in Mortonridge discuss the nature of possession and their rights to the bodies they have taken. They express the belief that their new bodies should not be taken away from them. They are not causing anyone any trouble, and have just as much right to sensory experience as the living. What they do not see is that their own actions betray how they truly feel about possession, as they are intent on saving the children. If possession was completely unproblematic and morally acceptable, they would not be attempting to save the children from that fate. By trying to return them to the living, they are acknowledging how different the possessed are from the living. Living amongst the possessed would not be a healthy environment for the children, and there would be a danger that they might be possessed one day too. They are also forgetting that the children they care about so much would not be in this mess had the possessed not stolen their parents' bodies. Their claim to be causing no harm also does not hold up under the reality of what they are. The example of Gerald Skibbow has shown the readers how much a person suffers when a possessor takes over their body. Knowing that Stephanie, Moyo and the others are inflicting this continuous pain on innocent people makes it harder to sympathize with them.

As Moyo and the others discuss the future of the possessed, it also becomes clear that a possessed society is not sustainable, at least in this universe. The possessed are not organized, and in some cases completely lost in a new time and on a new world. They are not producing enough food, and soon conflict will break out among them for what is left. Capone's Organization is holding up better, but even that is showing signs of failure as its economy collapses. Many possessed seem to be approaching their new lives by mindlessly repeating daily activities in a mockery of their former lives. Others are trying to fit in as many new experiences as they possibly can. These do not seem like the actions of souls who are entirely comfortable with or secure in their new existence. Stephanie herself expresses fear at the idea of living forever, which she claims to be almost as frightening as the thought of dying. The reader also wonders how much of the trapped soul within them comes out in their own desires and personalities.

McPhee points out that it is human nature to want to settle down and reproduce, but the latter is one thing the possessed can never do. They will never be able to have children of their own, as any children will carry the DNA of the stolen bodies, not the possessing souls. He has perhaps overvalued the importance of the children being related to their parents' souls, not their bodies, as parents are perfectly capable of loving adopted children. The possessed are forming strong attachments to the children they are trying to save, despite having no familial link to them. Then again, perhaps any children produced by the possessed would be constant reminders of their unnatural existence. A greater problem that McPhee does not anticipate is that the children, loved so much by

their parents, would then become candidates for possession when they grew up. No parent would allow this, and conflict would eventually break out. Even if the children were allowed to remain unpossessed, this would eventually lead to a society in which possessed would begin to be outnumbered by unpossessed once more. Eventually, the entire war would break out all over again. It would seem that societies of the possessed can never be sustainable in the long term.



# Chapter 8, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict

## Chapter 8, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Summary

Mzu, Lodi, Voi and Eriba have made it to Nyvan, landing in the Tonalá region. A group of possessed arrive at their hotel. They are all Garissan genocide victims, one of whom, Gelai, was once a student of Mzu's. Gelai tells Mzu that they will help her.

Joshua and his crew reach Nyvan and soon find out that Mzu is here too, under her alias of Daphne Kigano. The Lady Mac flies into the spaceport in Tonalá. Joshua instructs Ashly to keep the spaceplane ready for a quick evacuation. He then travels to the office of a security expert, Richard Keaton, and asks him to find Mzu. Richard asks for a lift off the planet in return, and Joshua agrees.

Samuel and Monica arrive at Nyvan and quickly find out that both Mzu and Joshua have landed in Tonalá. They also hear disturbing news that one of the New Georgia government's asteroids, Jesup, has been lost to the possessed. Jesup has sent ships to the other asteroids, an action that the other governments consider hostile. It looks like the various planetary factions will soon be at war. Monica and Samuel are alarmed at this situation, concluding that they will need to be quick. Meanwhile, Capone's ships arrive at Nyvan and ask the souls in the beyond where they can find Mzu. Time is running out for everyone.

Capone's possessed arrive at Mzu's hotel room but only Lodi and Omain, one of the Garissan possessed, are there. Capone's men break in, kill Omain, and capture Lodi. Mzu heads back to the hotel room to find Omain dead and Lodi missing. Capone's representative, Baranovich, contacts her through an AV projector to offer her freedom from possession in return for the Alchemist. Mzu says she will give them the Alchemist, but demands that Lodi and Voi should also go free. Baranovich agrees.

Back on Jesup, one of Nyvan's asteroids, Quinn is performing a satanic ritual to bind his followers to him. He tortures and crucifies a Christian priest on an inverted cross. When the priest dies, a soul enters the body from the beyond and stares at Quinn with his own face. He throws lightning at Twelve-T, burning his hands to expose the power cables in his wrists. The soul yells encouragement at Twelve-T, who lunges at Quinn. Lawrence jumps in the way to protect Quinn, and is killed by the electricity from the power cables. The possessing soul laughs and quips that they have both lost this time, before leaving the priest's body. Quinn is livid with anger. He goes to his command centre and orders his men to fire on the scout ships of the other Nyvan governments. He hopes to provoke as much all-out conflict as possible. He then makes his way to his ship, killing one of his followers and a mechanic on the way.



Quinn's men carry out his orders, provoking a fight between the different governments of Nyvan. The SD networks begin firing at each other, and combat wasps are launched. The Capone ships move to a lower orbit to avoid the crossfire, and the Lady Mac goes into defensive position.

## Chapter 8, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Analysis

Chapter 8 heightens the suspense and dramatic tension as many of the main characters converge on Nyvan, and the reader knows that Quinn lurks on the asteroid above. Quinn's position is symbolic of his power and mania. At this point, he thinks he is the powerful prophet of a vengeful and evil God. He looks down on the planet from high as a god would look at the world before exerting his will on it. The planet below, and the people on it, are entirely at his mercy. The reader knows that Quinn has terrible plans of pain and destruction for Nyvan, but is not quite sure what he intends to do yet.

The author gives a long, detailed description of the ironberg mining process, setting up the dramatic finale. Such a long description should notify the reader that this is important information. Given the potentially destructive power of the ironbergs if they should fall to the planet in the wrong way, the reader can begin to guess the danger that awaits the main characters on Nyvan. This builds a sense of impending doom and anxiety for the fate of the main characters on the planet below, on whom so many lives rely.

Quinn's insecure personality reaches new levels of sadistic mania in this chapter. He enjoys torturing the priest for the sense of power it gives him, both over another individual and more symbolically over the man's god. Every victory over a priest of the Christian god is seen by Quinn as a victory for his own god Satan, as it is the Christian god who is theologically opposed to him. Killing the priest would not be enough for Quinn, whose sadistic desires are almost sexual. He likes to see real suffering in order to make himself feel stronger and dominant. Then, when the body is taken over by a soul who mocks and opposes Quinn, Quinn can barely control his rage. It drives him into a frenzy of frustration and hatred. Quinn likes to feel that he is always in control and hates any challenge to his authority. To be mocked outright is his worst fear. He can only regain his poise and control by forcing others to submit to him once more. He goes to his control room and orders a course of action that will ensure maximum destruction. He enjoys bullying the souls who serve him, and even kills one of them on the way to his ship. This act of betrayal leaves him with a sense of superiority and power. Quinn can only regain calm and control through acts of violence such as these, reaffirming his position as an important prophet of his evil god.

Quinn's operations room is described like a command centre from the Second World War, immediately conjuring up a sinister atmosphere. The man in charge of the control centre is described as wearing a "heavily decorated Luftwaffe uniform from the Second World War" (pg. 291), meaning that this man had won many medals serving in the German air force in World War II. This soul watches as other possessed push little



models around on a tactical map. Immediately associations of Nazi evil, violence and genocide are drawn. Straight away the reader knows that the consequences for the planet below will be extremely severe. The men in the room, however disturbing the associations they conjure up, are all terrified of Quinn. This serves to heighten the sense of dread the reader feels around the character of Quinn, as even a decorated Nazi war-veteran is frightened of him. This is because Quinn is not merely evil but fanatical and slightly unhinged. A maniacal man is always more frightening than a sane man due to his unpredictability. Quinn's men simply do not know where they stand or what he will do next, and so obey him out of desperation and fear.

The soul who takes over the body of the priest to challenge Quinn is a mysterious figure. The reader is made to question who this soul might be. He talks to Quinn as if he knows him from somewhere, and certainly does not seem afraid of him. The soul's determination to stop Quinn, and apparent unconcern at returning to the beyond, are unusual. This suggests that there are souls in the beyond who can think beyond the need for sensory experience, to form long-term plans and greater goals. This will remind the reader of Skibbow's wife, who returned from the beyond in the last book to help her husband, but showed no fear of the beyond. This certainly suggests that the beyond is a transitory place that can be escaped. Souls can choose to remain there without losing their minds and willpower in the torment that other souls describe, and can then choose to move on when their plans have been carried through. We wonder how some souls have managed to achieve this when others cannot. How can some souls endure the beyond without suffering, when others who possess living bodies would do anything not to return?

In chapter 8, for the first time in the book Mzu is forced to question the ethics of having created the Alchemist. Until now, she has been so focused on revenge that she has not even considered the threat that the possessed really pose to humanity, and how doomed they will all be if the possessed manage to acquire the Alchemist. Mzu has arrogantly supposed that she will always be the one in control of the weapon, but now she realizes that she cannot ensure this. As soon as she set about creating the weapon, she began a chain of events that would one day lead to someone else getting their hands on the Alchemist. Even though she could not have predicted the emergence of the possessed, she should have been able to see the inevitability of what her invention would cause. She did not think through the consequences of her actions.

Even Gelai, one of the Garissan genocide victims, can see further than Mzu on this issue, as she calls the Alchemist evil and is saddened that it was ever created. She also claims that she would not wish to see Omuta harmed out of revenge for her own death. Mzu is humbled by this, taking it as proof that her planet and her people were something special, and that they deserve to be avenged. Mzu is completely missing the point of Gelai's example. Gelai was a student and a peace protestor, yet her high ideals did not save her from being killed when Omuta attacked the planet. If Mzu were not so blinded by her hatred and need for revenge, she would see that in war it is always the innocents, like Gelai, who suffer. Mzu herself, and the Navy men and women accompanying her, were not on the planet at the time. It is also highly likely that important government members would have been evacuated. It is rarely the ones in



authority, the ones responsible for the war and the decisions of the military, who die in conflicts such as this. Instead, it is the ordinary citizens, such as Gelai, who are the victims. In the same way, Mzu's weapon would only cause the most pain and suffering for the innocents on Omuta. Perhaps there is a student like Gelai on Omuta, protesting for tolerance right now, who will be one of the victims of Mzu's plot for revenge. If Mzu uses her weapon against Omuta's sun, the Omtuan authorities will be evacuated and carry on in power and riches, like Ilkela and other important Garissans. It is the Omtuan people who will be homeless and devastated, like the Garissan people. This is definitely a case where two wrongs cannot possibly make a right.

Gelai's statement that Mzu's weapon is evil and should never have been created also opens another interesting argument. Should weapons of mass destruction ever be created? Mzu's answer is the common response of many governments dealing with such weapons, that if she does not develop it, her enemy will. She will then be helpless when her enemy uses it against her. This, however, is an approach that can be twisted to justify almost anything. In Mzu's case, she intends to use the Alchemist against Omuta because it is a good way to get rid of the weapon, and keep it out of the hands of the possessed. If she simply does not use it, she cannot be sure that someone will not find it and use it themselves one day. Perhaps the better approach to this problem is just not to develop the weapons at all. Once a weapon has been made, others will copy it, beginning an inevitable arms race. However, deliberately holding back from developing new weapons leaves one vulnerable to the next big bully who comes along, whether it be another government or the possessed. No government wants to leave itself and its people vulnerable. This is the argument surrounding the creation, holding and use of weapons of mass destruction that plagues governments today. By exploring the issues surrounding the creation of a new science fiction weapon, Hamilton forces the reader to question the values and morality of our own weapons programs.





# Chapter 9, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict

## Chapter 9, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Summary

Syrinx takes the information that Erick gave her to Admiral Aleksandrovich. They now know that Capone intends to attack Toi-Hoi and make plans to ambush him. They decide to gather their own fleet at Tranquillity to prepare for the ambush.

Jed and the Deadnights prepare to leave for Valisk. When Navar, Jed's half-sister, demands to come too he is forced to agree. Beth persuades the reluctant captain to take them all or he can give their money back. As the Deadnights leave Koblat, the Villeneuve's Revenge arrives, requesting refueling.

Stephanie, her friends, and the children arrive at the town of Chainbridge, where the possessor Ekelund is gathering a force of possessed to combat whatever the Saldanas decide to throw at them. She is scathing of Stephanie and questions her loyalties, but allows them to pass through with the children. Moyo goes in search of working toilets for the children to use, but instead finds a non-possessed man inside a warehouse. His instinctual reaction is to lash out with his white fire, but the flames flow over the man harmlessly. The man says he lived in Exnall once, and has been observing humans for eighteen centuries waiting to see what happens when they discover the beyond. He hints that he holds some kind of reality dysfunction abilities despite not being possessed, and that there are many more watchers like him. He tells Moyo there is a toilet in the next warehouse, and then walks away.

Louise, Genevieve and Fletcher are now heading for High York, one of Earth's asteroids, aboard the starship Jamrana. Louise worries about the security measures they will face there. Endron has warned her that Earth security is extremely tight, and that they will not get through in the company of Fletcher.

Jacqueline Coutier and the other possessed held by the Confederation Navy have been taken to a court to determine if they should be classed as hostile prisoners under the terms of a state of emergency. When the judge arrives, the four possessed attack everyone in the courtroom. Navy officers manage to close the door and lock the possessed inside the courtroom, but Maynard Khanna, the Admiral's staff captain, has been possessed. The possessing soul finds out from him that the Navy is planning to ambush Capone's forces at Toi-Hoi. Jacqueline decides this information is more important than their lives. She kills the other possessed so that the Navy will not find out what they know, and instructs the souls to take their information to Capone. The marines burst in to find only Jacqueline Coutier alive.



## Chapter 9, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Analysis

Chapter 9, for the first time in any of the books, gives the reader some hope that the living may be able to win their war against the possessed. The possibility of defeating Capone becomes plausible, and with it, the chance to score a huge victory against the possessed. If Capone were beaten, the largest organized force of the possessed would be neutralized. The Confederation would be left with individual captured planets and asteroids, a much smaller threat. A workable solution to the larger problems of death and possession could then be worked on much more easily. Perhaps some of the less aggressive possessed might even be persuaded to work with them to provide information, once it became clear that the Confederation has the power to defeat such a powerful opposing force as Capone's Organization. Morale and hope would also increase among the living, allowing the Admiral to work without the pressure of their fears and demands. With Capone gone, it would also dramatically reduce the chances of any organized force of the possessed getting their hands on the Alchemist. This represents a huge breakthrough for the living, and it seems that the huge, final conflicts will soon come. Erick's information, allowing these plans to ambush Capone, has proved absolutely vital to the Confederation, justifying everything he has gone through and all the compromises he has had to make.

However, this hope is only dangled tantalizingly in front of the reader for the length of this chapter. At the end of the chapter, the possessed find out about the ambush and it seems that hope is once again lost. All it took was for one small group of possessed to make trouble, far away from Capone. These souls are not even part of Capone's Organization, yet they understand that the defeat of Capone will seriously harm the cause of the possessed everywhere. They will stick together against a common enemy: the living. The nature of the possessed means that information such as this, gathered in a different part of the galaxy, can quickly be taken to Capone through the beyond. This reminds the reader of exactly what the living are dealing with. The possessed have so many advantages that the living do not have, even beyond their enhanced strength and energetic abilities. The living cannot communicate with each other instantaneously, as information and communications cannot travel faster than the speed of light, nor can they open up wormholes to send it through as they do with ships. This means that the fastest way to communicate or relay important information is via the ships. When the Admiral makes his decision to use Tranquillity as a base, and to inform Meredith Saldana of the situation, he can do neither straight away. Instead, he must ask Syrinx to physically take the information to them. It will take Syrinx seven to eight hours to reach Meredith Saldana at Cadiz, and a further twenty hours to reach Tranquillity. The souls in the beyond, however, do not seem to be limited in such ways.

Another huge advantage that the possessed display, as shown here, is that when they possess a body they can extract information from it. There are therefore many ways for the possessed to gain information from the living. They can torture, threaten, blackmail or possess the living body, or simply wait for the living to die and gain the information from their soul in the beyond. The living find it much harder to obtain intelligence about



the possessed. The possessed do not have the same interests or family connections, making blackmail nearly impossible. They can be threatened and tortured, but a soul suffering too much could just choose to leave the body. Killing the possessed will only result in ending the life of the unfortunate victim being possessed, sending another soul into the beyond. Zero-tau will only serve to send the possessing soul back into the beyond, after which it might conceivably just possess a different body. This means that for the possessed, defeating the living is just a matter of time, as all people will die eventually. For the living, defeating the possessed must be done quickly and decisively to stop them from gaining too much of an advantage.

The author creates dramatic irony by placing the reader in a position of knowing that the Confederation plan is doomed to failure, while the living characters still believe that they have the upper hand. While the Confederation can open themselves up to hope for the first time since the beginning of the war with the possessed, the reader can only despair. It seems that Erick Thakrar's efforts and suffering were in vain after all, and that the Confederation Navy will soon be destroyed. Syrinx is flying to Tranquillity, which is now in an extremely vulnerable position if Capone decides to plan his own ambush there. If Tranquillity is destroyed, Joshua will have no place to return if he manages to capture Mzu. The defeat of the Confederation forces will place them in a weak position and the Admiral may be forced to withdraw support from Ombey. Suddenly, it seems that all the hopes and efforts of the main characters are to be destroyed, and that Capone cannot possibly be beaten. The reader has been plunged straight from the hope of victory to the almost certain knowledge of defeat. This is the lowest point in the series for the chances of the living, and the reader wonders if things can possibly get any worse.

Given the devastating impact of Jacqueline Coutier's trial, the reader is forced to question whether the possessed should have been given this right at all. They are clearly the enemy, held during a time of an extreme crisis involving the whole human race. However, they are also prisoners captured during a conflict between two opposing factions, and as such should be treated as prisoners of war. This would normally mean that they should be treated humanely, without torture or deliberate inflicted suffering. The reader might also consider that at the time Jacqueline was captured, the Confederation was not officially at war with the possessed. As such, her abduction from Lalonde and holding without a trial could be seen as completely illegal. It is also questionable as to whether the Confederation is officially at war with the possessed even now. The 'possessed' do not necessarily represent one organized group or faction. Although the Confederation is at war with Capone, by extension they cannot necessarily claim to be at war with all possessed. In the same way, if a modern state declared war against a largely Christian country, they would not officially be at war with all Christians all over the world.

Taking these observations into account, it no longer becomes clear that Jacqueline Coutier should be tortured and held without trial. In fact, her lawyer had concluded that he could make a compelling case for her release. On the other hand, it is clear to everyone how dangerous the possessed are, and that allowing her the trial was a huge mistake. This raises questions that are relevant to modern society's treatment of



prisoners, particularly political enemies of the state and those accused of terrorism. Is it ever acceptable to waive a person's human rights, and if so, in what circumstances can this be justified? Can torture ever be condoned, or is this simply taking things too far, regardless of the circumstances? In terms of this story, the reader might want to consider whether a possessing soul can be allowed the same human rights as the living. Can the dead even still be classed as 'human'? What about the rights of the soul trapped within the stolen body? Jacqueline Coutier is a useful test subject for the Navy, but do they not have a duty to place her into zero-tau to give the living soul her body back?

Chapter 9 also introduces another new element to the 'Night's Dawn' universe. Having recently been introduced to the concept of ghosts, we are now shown the existence of beings that are not possessed and not completely human. These beings watch over humanity, waiting for the discovery of the beyond. They appear to live for an incredibly long time, perhaps even forever, with this particular 'watcher' claiming to have been observing humans for eighteen centuries. These beings do not appear to be another form of the dead, like the possessed, the ghosts and the souls in the beyond. Instead, they seem almost more like an evolved form of human, or even gods. However, their use of powers beyond even those of the possessed suggests that they have something to do with the possessed. Perhaps they are people who have somehow overcome possession but retained the energetic abilities, as Quinn Dexter has done. Perhaps they are an alien race who were victorious against the possessed when they discovered the beyond. This 'watcher' does not appear to be threatening or antagonistic to the possessed, and the 'watcher' character that Joshua meets later is happy to help the living. These new beings, then, whatever they are, do not necessarily seem to be picking sides. We wonder what their purpose could be, whether they are simply observing or trying to push events to a more optimal conclusion. They seem to represent hope that the conflict can be resolved. As beings who seem mostly human, have extended lifespans, hold some kind of reality dysfunction abilities, and who are not antagonistic to either side, they perhaps demonstrate some form of understanding or compromise between possessed and living. If these beings represent the answer to everyone's problems, then perhaps a little hope has been restored after all. Perhaps the ultimate victory will not come from a fight in which the Confederation and Capone destroy each other, but a more philosophical resolution represented by these higher beings.

On a smaller scale, the false hopes built up and then dashed for the Confederation are reflected in the hopes of the Deadnights. Now that it seems as though the Deadnight kids on Koblat will actually be able to reach Valisk after all, both Jed and Beth are resolving their feelings about the journey. For Jed, moving to Valisk means the embracing of his own hopes and wishes. Jed believes that Kiera's society will be one of peace, tolerance and respect. Now that reaching it is a very real possibility, Jed realizes that he must begin to live up to those values. Rather than turning his hated half-sister away, he tries to welcome her. He worries that if he cannot let go of resentment and jealousy, then he will not be worthy of Kiera when he arrives. For him, Kiera and the Deadnight cause has become something of a religion, for which he must change his values, behavior and beliefs.



Whereas Jed is beginning to take down the tough shell that he has built around him to protect himself from the pain and indifference he experiences at home, Beth is busy building up her own shell. Beth is becoming a lot harder and tougher, less naïve and more determined. She now takes charge of the situation, bullying Jed's half-sister into good behavior and cajoling the captain into agreeing to take all of them on his ship. She does not see the Deadnight cause as a religion as Jed does, nor does she idealize Kiera in the same way. Beth's vision of Valisk is a place where they can be appreciated and no longer treated with disrespect. For her, that starts now. The successful carrying through of their plans, and the responsibility of helping Gerald, has given her a new confidence and focus that she never had before. For both of them, their hopes are finally coming true, and they look forward to a more positive future. The dramatic irony attached to the Confederation's hopes of defeating Capone is repeated here. The Deadnights think things are finally starting to go their way, but the readers know that their hopes are false ones. When they reach Valisk they will meet only suffering and possession. Jed's attempt to save and include his half-sister will actually only lead to her doom.



# Chapter 10, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict

## Chapter 10, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Summary

Chapter 10 focuses entirely on events in the habitat Valisk. Bonney gathers together the possessed to hunt and kill Dariat. Dariat agrees to enter the neural strata of Valisk to join with Rubra, but wishes to get Tatiana off Valisk first. Rubra instructs them to go to the spaceport, where she can be jettisoned in a life pod and picked up by the Edenist voidhawks. They use the tube trains to head to the spaceport, but Bonney and the possessed are blowing up the tube tracks. The station ahead of Dariat is blocked. Rubra simultaneously attacks all the possessed at the various stations, electrocuting the two possessed guarding the station ahead of Dariat. As Dariat and Tatiana proceed, Bonney sends more possessed down to investigate. Dariat kills one, but as others come towards them he realizes they cannot escape through the tubes. Rubra sends them down into the starscraper to hide out from the possessed.

In the starscraper, the possessed are closing in on Dariat and Tatiana. Dariat and Tatiana attach cushions to themselves for buoyancy, and then jump down into the toilet that Rubra has broken and widened for them. They push through a tunnel to land in a tank full of water. Rubra has closed the inlet channels and reversed the flow so that the water level has risen. He then pumps more water in so that Dariat and Tatiana will rise to the top of the starscraper to ground level. When the possessed find the broken toilet and try to follow, Rubra releases jets of water from the toilets all over the starscraper, pulverizing and drowning all the possessed. Bonney survives, and swears that she will kill Dariat. She heads to the spaceport to attack him there.

The remaining possessed give up on violence and prepare to take the habitat out of the universe. Meanwhile, Bonney has reached the spaceport, but Dariat hopes the many stairs up will delay her. However, Bonney transforms herself into a giant, winged creature to fly up to the spaceport instead. Rubra sends a concentration of power into the plasma cells above Bonney. These are the cells responsible for lighting the habitat. Bonney is blasted with the force and heat of a small fusion bomb, killing her instantly.

Dariat puts Tatiana and his body into an escape pod, before leaving the body to join his soul with the habitat's neural strata. Rubra jettisons the life pods, and Tatiana is rescued by the Edenist voidhawks. The hellhawks surrounding Valisk swallow away in fright. Finally, Rubra and Dariat remove Valisk from the universe, taking it to a place where the possessed will not be able to hold onto their stolen bodies. Valisk is gone.



## Chapter 10, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Analysis

Chapter 10 is a pivotal chapter for Rubra, Dariat and the fate of Valisk, as the possessed are finally defeated, Bonney destroyed, and Dariat joins his personality with Rubra's neural strata. As such, the chapter focuses entirely on the events inside the habitat of Valisk, rather than following the books' usual structure of hopping from one character and location to another.

In this chapter, Rubra suggests the idea of fate. He wonders if fate led Anastasia and Dariat to meet, and so guided all the events leading up until now. Dariat is surprised that Rubra might even consider this possibility, but perhaps Rubra is being influenced by a sense of destiny and purpose surrounding death and the beyond. When faced with the existence of a separate realm in which the dead exist beyond death, and the fact that they can come back to possess the living, it is natural that anyone would question whether there is order or purpose behind this. For Rubra, there is the added sense that Dariat was always meant to fuse with him. Rubra had pushed and pursued this since Dariat was a child, but things always seemed to get in his way. Dariat, equally, had resisted Rubra's attempts to persuade him. Now both are preparing to join, after all this time, when their joint powers have never been more needed. It certainly seems as if fate might have a guiding hand in all that they do. This raises the question of whether fate exists, and whether all the characters in the books are guided by some mysterious sense of destiny. The main characters' lives often seem to merge and collide in ways that seem more than just mere chance. When Syrinx talked to one of the Kiint it told her that humanity needed to search for its destiny. What does destiny have to do with death and the beyond? Perhaps this was the Kiint's way of saying that all life is guided by a mysterious power or fate, and that there is order to the universe. If so, does this suggest the existence of a higher authority, or God?

Revenge is a strong theme in this chapter. Finally, Dariat is able to let go of his absolute hatred and need for vengeance. He now realizes that there are other things more important than his own troubles and wishes. As the threat that the possessed will take over the habitat becomes a real possibility, Dariat knows that he must stop them, and the only way to do that is to forget his grudge and join with Rubra. He admits that he has been living like a child until now, wallowing in his feelings and obsessions without really taking any decisive action, just waiting for something to happen. He knows that now is the time for him to grow and step up. Now he can finally prove to Anastasia that her love for him was justified, and that he can be more than just a vessel of hate and rage. Tatiana congratulated Dariat on his breakthrough, telling him that he has finally beaten Anstid. Defeating Anstid did not involve a great fight, or the physical obliteration of some evil monster or god-like figure. Instead, the only way to defeat Anstid was for Dariat to stop being motivated by hate and revenge. Whether Anstid is to be understood as a symbol for a person's destructive emotions, or as an actual god or demon, his power over someone can only last as long as that person lets it. As soon as a person stops letting destructive emotions drive them, then they no longer belong to Anstid and can begin to make their own decisions once more.



While Dariat has finally been able to let go of his anger, Bonney is being completely consumed by hers. Throughout the book she has been getting angrier and more intent on killing Dariat. She hates to feel mocked and powerless, and cannot stand the thought that she could be beaten. She sees the chase of Dariat as a test of her abilities, and every time he escapes it feels like a mockery and insult. Each time Dariat eludes her, or Rubra cleverly beats her schemes, she grows more and more furious. Her hatred of Dariat and Rubra has become personal, beyond the need to catch and stop a potential threat. Her whole purpose for being becomes about defeating the pair. Bonney becomes what Dariat used to be: a vessel of hate and vengeance that leaves no room for a person. Like other characters in the book who pursue revenge over all else, she is blinded by her anger. She allows the other possessed to put themselves into situations in which they can be killed by Rubra, seriously depleting her forces. Finally, when the possessed have had enough and prepare to take the habitat out of the universe, Bonney can no longer side with her own kind. She fails to see that removing the habitat to a new universe would be the best way to defeat Rubra and Dariat at this point. Instead she is contemptuous of the possessed's aims and focuses all her thoughts on her enemies alone. She no longer wants simply to defeat Rubra and Dariat. She wants to make them suffer at her own hands. As she prepares to face Dariat at the starscraper, she loses the last shreds of her humanity, literally transforming into a terrible monster. This creature is bat-like, with fangs, red eyes, and leathery wings. This creates instant associations with vampires, demons and the Devil. She seems to have transformed into a personification of evil itself, symbolic of the loss of her humanity to rage and hatred.

The other possessed also change into monsters, strange creatures and fantasy characters at various points. When they think that they have caught Dariat and are closing in for the kill, their transformations grow particularly ridiculous. These include a troll, an alien, a faerie prince, cyber ninjas, Neanderthals, and soldiers from various eras. These transformations are symbolic of the inhumanity of the possessed. Unlike the possessed living on Ombey, these souls are not trying to carry out normal lives and pretending to be alive again. Nor are they trying to form a government or enter into a war with the living like Capone. These are all activities carried out by the living, things that the possessed of Valisk are not interested in. They have embraced their monstrous side, representing it through their looks. They acknowledge the fact that they are creatures who have returned from the dead, not quite human anymore, and enjoy playing with the idea. They regularly torture Deadnight kids who arrive at the habitat to open up their souls for possession, an act that must be wearing away any remains of humanity within them. They now want to kill and torture Dariat, a ferocious desire reflected by their appearance. For them, their existence after returning to the sensory world has been like a game or dream, where they have supernatural powers and can do whatever they like. They can no longer think of themselves as 'normal' people. Transforming their appearance also gives the souls a sense of superiority and power, of being more than just human, but godly or fantasy creatures. This is why the transformations become more brutal and bizarre as they feel that they are close to a victory against their victims. They feel powerful and unstoppable.





When Rubra finally kills Bonney, he is prompted by the Edenists' mention of the Icarus myth. According to ancient Greek mythology, Daedalus made himself and his son Icarus some wings with which to escape their imprisonment. Daedalus warned Icarus not to fly too close to the sun, but Icarus ignored his father's words. The sun melted the wax holding the feathers in the wings together, and Icarus plummeted to his death. The moral of the story is that pride comes before a fall. Icarus tried to fly too high, despite being told that he should not. His hubris was punished by the gods, as the Greeks understood all natural phenomena such as the sun's light and warmth to be caused by the gods. Here, the myth of Icarus is paralleled in the death of Bonney. Bonney was consumed by pride and rage, so arrogant in herself and her own abilities that she transformed into a monster to fly. She dared to defy the habitat personality, who controls every aspect of the environment in which she is currently living. The result was that the habitat used the full force of its capabilities to kill her, burning her with the heat of its 'sun.'

Rubra's power is described as being "like the breath of an enraged sungod" (pg. 385.) This not only links back to the Icarus myth, it also compares Rubra to a god. Rubra, as the habitat personality, displays many of the traditional characteristics and powers associated with gods. He has complete power over the environment, the land and the seas. He sends servitors and bitek creatures to do his bidding, controls all functions within the habitat, including the tube trains and everything inside the starscrapers, and controls the weather inside the habitat. With his powers he electrocutes the possessed, sends the creatures of the habitat to kill them, carries Dariat and Tatiana to safety in the sewage tanks, but kills the possessed with the same water system, and controls the 'sun' rising, even making it focus in one small burst of energy to destroy Bonney. He takes vengeance on his enemies and saves his own people. He enjoys being trusted by his people, feeling a sense of obligation to them, and hates to be defied. He watches over everything that happens in the habitat and, in a sense, exists everywhere at once. By many definitions, these characteristics are enough for him to be considered a god. In a sense, Rubra is God to the inhabitants of his little world. If a habitat personality can act and control its world in this way, then is it such a stretch to believe that there might be a more powerful god in charge of the universe?

The end of chapter 10 sees the disappearance of Valisk, as Rubra and Dariat take it into a universe in which the possessed cannot stand to exist. The reader is left to wonder what this will mean for the living bodies that the possessors will leave behind, and for the remaining non-possessed. Will they be able to survive in this new place that is hostile to the possessed? What will happen to the possessed? Will they die, disappear, or linger as ghosts or souls in the beyond? The disappearance of Valisk also foreshadows the disappearance of Tranquillity at the end of the book, when the reader will wonder if something similar has happened to it.



# Chapter 11, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict

## Chapter 11, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Summary

On Nyvan, Voi yells at Mzu for agreeing to give the Alchemist to Capone. Mzu tells her that she intends to lead the possessed to the Alchemist, then detonate it, killing the possessed and destroying the weapon. She is adamant that no one will get their hands on the Alchemist, and believes that if she comes back as a possessor she will have the resolve to remain firm.

As Mzu leaves the hotel to go meet Baranovich, her car is followed by Joshua and his companions, Monica and Samuel, various other agents, and the local police. Mzu heads for the ironberg foundry yard. As three organization planes also head for the yard, Samuel orders the Edenist flyers to intercept them. The flyers quickly destroy one plane, but are then blasted from above by the orbiting Organization ships. None of the Edenist flyers survive. Now the Organization frigates target the cars, hoping to kill Mzu and retrieve the coordinates of the Alchemist from her soul. As the Organization ships begin to blast the cars, Samuel instructs the voidhawks to distract them. The voidhawks engage the Organization ships in combat, and the ensuing battle causes the planet's SD networks to retaliate.

With space full of combat wasps and nukes, the Lady Mac is in danger of getting caught in the crossfire. Sarha decides to sit still, as they will be instantly targeted if they move. Then Cherri Barnes contacts them from one of the Organization ships to warn them that the possessed have altered the trajectory of one of the ironberg tugs. Soon, one of the huge ironbergs will drop on the foundry yard where Joshua and his team currently are. Cherri Barnes then leaves her possessed body and goes back into the beyond before the other possessed on her ship can punish her treachery. Now the Lady Mac is forced to try to fly through the raging space-battle to warn Joshua, as they are currently out of range of communications.

Meanwhile, inside one of the foundry yard's sheds, Baranovich greets Mzu. He then throws Lodi to his death from the high walkway they are standing on. As he prepares to attack Mzu, Gelai fires back and yells at Mzu to run. She does, but comes face to face with Joshua. Joshua is just telling her to come back to Tranquillity with him when Monica arrives and takes over. As Monica and Samuel attempt to leave with Mzu, the possessed attack them, killing two operatives with a portcullis. Monica pushes Mzu out of the way of a swinging blade, injuring her leg badly. Joshua then throws Monica to the ground, saving her life as the blade swings back. Gelai heals Monica's leg, and they all make a run for the opening in the shed wall.



The possessed now attack the police outside, who instantly fire at the shed. With the escape route blocked and the framework of the shed starting to collapse, Joshua makes a blind run for his life. Everyone else assumes he must know what he is doing and follows him. Joshua runs straight forward, forgetting that there is a huge basin full of water in the middle of the shed. Richard Keaton is hit in the back by the possessed's white fire before everyone tumbles into the basin. Amazingly, Richard is not hurt. Now everyone is temporarily safe from the possessed, but they begin to freeze to death in the icy water. Joshua tells Samuel to communicate with the lone-serjeant via affinity. He does so, and the serjeant shoots the canal lock gate open. The water gushes out into the drained canal outside the shed, carrying everyone inside the basin with it. As Joshua is being carried forward by the torrent of water, Sarha communicates with him to warn him about the ironberg, which will hit in seven minutes.

Joshua notices some scaffolding sticking out of the water and datavisises to everyone to grab hold of it. Eriba, Melvyn, and some of the operatives are drowned, but the rest make it out safely. Joshua directs the Lady Mac's laser beam onto the shed, obliterating it and the possessed inside. Ashly is now safe to land the spaceplane and collect all the survivors. Gelai and Ngong, the possessed helping Mzu, relinquish their bodies and goes back into the beyond. Only Richard Keaton stays behind, explaining that his cover has been blown. Joshua asks what he is, but Richard does not give him an answer. The spaceplane takes off, managing to get away before the ironberg hits.

Quinn Dexter watches the space-battle with glee, and then executes a command to detonate the bombs he has placed on Jesup. The asteroid blows up. Quinn explains to Dwyer that all the fragments will rain down on Nyvan, each one much more destructive than the ironberg. They will throw up soot and other filth into the atmosphere, so thick that the sun will be permanently blocked out. He has brought eternal night to Nyvan, his first offering to God's Brother. His ship then jumps out of the system.

## **Chapter 11, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Analysis**

Chapter 11 focuses on events on Nyvan as the various factions pursuing Mzu finally close in on her. The main themes of the chapter are conflict and destruction. Tension and suspense are heightened with each new problem the main characters face. Things get progressively worse throughout the chapter as each minor victory for the 'good guys' is immediately followed by a fresh dilemma. So, when Joshua, Samuel and Monica finally locate and follow Mzu, they are led straight to the possessed. When the Edenist flyers defeat the Organization planes, Capone's ships destroy the flyers from orbit. The Edenist voidhawks manage to distract the Organization frigates from firing on the cars, but the ensuing battle causes the planet's SD networks to become involved, creating even more havoc and destruction. Just when the reader thinks that Samuel and Monica might finally be able to leave with Mzu, their escape route is blocked. The main characters manage to escape the possessed by jumping into the basin, but are now trapped, vulnerable and slowly freezing to death. When the lone-serjeant shoots out the canal lock gate, everyone in the basin is freed, but they now must contend with the



rough torrent of water carrying them along. Though some drown, the majority manage to get out of the water, only to have the threat of the falling ironberg thrust on them. Finally, the spaceplane manages to pick them up and they escape before the ironberg can crush them. The reader thinks that the worst is over now that the main characters are safe. However, the destruction has not ended yet, as Quinn blows up the asteroid Jesup. The asteroid fragments rain down on the planet, and Nyvan is doomed.

Part of what makes such absolute destruction possible is the conflict and suspicions of the many different factions. The aggressive governments on Nyvan are easily manipulated into fighting one another, and the paranoid atmosphere leads to a confusing battle in which everyone seems to be shooting at everyone else without much idea why. The local police are also easily manipulated into shooting blindly at the shed, causing more trouble for the living than the possessed. Joshua, Samuel and Monica, the local police, and the possessed helping Mzu all manage to get in each other's way. At first, Mzu is running from everyone, trying to get to the possessed. Then, when the possessed turn on her, she quickly realizes that accepting Joshua's help would be a sensible action. Just when things might be resolved, Monica steps up and immediately presses a gun to Joshua's back. She claims the right to arrest Mzu instead. Though Monica and Samuel have temporarily managed to resolve their differences, they are far too suspicious and paranoid to let any other faction get hold of Mzu.

If the various factions trying to locate Mzu had been able to think sensibly rather than politically, they would have realized that cooperation would be the best tactic. Their combined efforts might have led to a better prepared and organized effort, and they might not now find themselves trapped by the possessed. As Tranquillity would be the best place for everyone involved to send Mzu, there is really no reason for conflict between the different factions. Their combined goal should have been to capture her and take her back to Tranquillity. Ironically, this is actually exactly what is eventually decided. If only the decision could have been made earlier, it would have saved them all a lot of trouble. If Mzu had been thinking logically instead of obsessing over plans of revenge, she would also have realized that working with the agencies would be the best option. As soon as the threat of the possessed became apparent, she should have realized that her weapon needed to be destroyed. When she did realize this, too late, on Nyvan, she should have immediately turned to the agencies and Joshua for help, but she still imagined that she could do everything alone. The priority from the beginning, for everyone involved, should simply have been to keep the Alchemist out of the hands of the possessed at all costs. This should have come above all other concerns.

It is unfortunate that none of them realize this until they are faced with such a big crisis. Now, Samuel and Monica, Joshua, Mzu and the possessed helping her, are all forced to work together in order to survive. Now we begin to see what can be achieved when people cooperate rather than fight over their differences. Monica saves Mzu from the possessed, and Joshua then saves Monica. Gelai heals Monica's wound, and they all try to escape together. When Joshua runs, the others follow him. In the basin, Joshua's idea helps them to escape, but it cannot be achieved without the use of Samuel's affinity and the help of Tranquillity's serjeant. In the water, Joshua devises an escape route to everyone, not just to his own team and Mzu, and when the spaceplane arrives it lifts



everyone to safety. Through adversity, the opposing factions have had to cooperate and rely on each other, even trusting each other, in order to survive. Finally, however, there is one faction that still cannot be trusted. Joshua cannot allow the possessed on his plane, no matter how much they have assisted or wish to help. In the conflict with Capone's possessed, the living can resolve their differences in the face of a greater common enemy. To resolve differences with members of that enemy faction is a step too far. This chapter represents a huge breakthrough for the mission to secure the Alchemist. Now that the competing factions have learnt to work together, there seems to be hope at last that they might be able to stop it from falling into the hands of the possessed.

In this chapter, the author also explores the complex morality and motivations of characters who we might consider 'evil.' Throughout the chapter, it becomes very complicated for the reader to decide whether Mzu is one of the 'good guys' or the 'bad guys.' Mzu tells Voi that she is childish and has never thought through her plans and the level of suffering they will cause for the Omutans. Mzu claims that for thirty years she has thought of nothing else, having to come to terms with the pain and suffering she will inflict. In the light of these comments, which character comes across as the more evil? Voi is naïve, thoughtless and hotheaded, not fully comprehending the scale of suffering she will cause, thinking only of higher ideals of justice and revenge. In comparison, Mzu's cold, calculating decisions seem so much worse, as she is fully aware of the evil she is committing but is willing to do it anyway. Mzu comes across as a very hard, ruthless and unsympathetic character here. However, this is immediately countered by the fact that she is willing to die to stop the Alchemist from falling into the hands of the possessed. She is brave enough to do what she sees as the right thing, whether it is others' lives or her own life that are destroyed by it. Now that the full horrors of death and the beyond are known to everyone, Mzu's decision seems all the braver and nobler. For the first time, the reader is also given a glimpse of deeper motivations that may lie behind Mzu's obsession, as she mentions the man she loves. She claims that choice has never played much of a part in her life, but this sounds a little too much like an easy excuse. Mzu has had plenty of choice. She could have remained on Tranquillity and never looked for revenge. Once she became aware of the threat the possessed really pose, she could have turned herself over to the authorities, or worked with them to destroy her weapon. She could have offered her services and skills in the fight against the possessed. At any point in her mission she could have abandoned her plans and returned to Tranquillity. Mzu comes across as a very complicated character, one who is not moved by simple motivations. She appears to think carefully and logically about her actions, but at other times to act foolishly or pettily. She believes with absolute certainty that she is doing the right thing, and will not shirk from what she sees as her duty. She is also brave and fiercely loyal to her country. She does not seem overly vindictive or unreasonable, yet she can be utterly cold and ruthless. She is willing to kill anyone that gets in her way or might threaten her plans, as Cherri Barnes warns Sarha in this chapter. The reader is reminded that it was Mzu who killed Cherri Barnes after her ship helped Mzu escape Tranquillity. Mzu is a character that cannot be classified as a hero or villain as simply as other characters might be.



If Mzu seems to be an odd mix of loyalties and emotions, so too is Cherri Barnes. Like Mzu, Cherri cannot be easily separated into a 'good' or 'bad' category. She is one of the possessed, who has stolen her body and inflicts suffering on the soul trapped within. She has helped Capone to find Mzu, working for an evil Organization that threatens the Confederation, and eventually the entire human race. Even when alive, Cherri's loyalties and motivations were questionable. As a member of a blackhawk's crew, she would often become involved in illegal operations. In fact, it was Cherri's ship that made it possible for Mzu to escape Tranquillity in the first place. However, her past friendships and ties cannot easily be forgotten. When she becomes aware of Lady Mac's presence at Nyvan, she warns Sarha of the Organization's plans. She confesses to Sarha that the beyond is a terrible place and that souls will do anything to escape it. She is confused, not wanting to go back to the beyond, but also not wanting her friends to suffer. She says that she thinks she belongs with the possessed, but does not want to work for Capone, complaining that his followers have no sense of fraternity. Cherri is a woman who has suddenly found herself, through no choice of her own, thrust onto the other side in a war that threatens everything she used to hold dear. She does not know whether to be sympathetic to the people she has only just left, or whether to look out for her own interests. She is distressed enough to go back into the beyond, despite her terror of it, in order to feel less conflicted about betraying old acquaintances. Unlike other souls who have been in the beyond for longer and lost touch with their former lives, Cherri has entered a world where everything is familiar, and in which people she cares about still survive. For the first time, the reader is given an insight into how confusing and frightening it must be for such souls. Throughout the book we have been shown through characters like Cherri, Fletcher, Stephanie and her friends, Gelai and the others helping Mzu, and Gerald's wife, that we cannot easily place a character into the 'enemy' category simply because they are a possessor.

This chapter also sees the introduction of another 'watcher' character like the one Moyo met at Chainbridge on Ombey. Richard Keaton claims Joshua should be asking him 'what' he is rather than 'who' he is, suggesting that he is not quite human. Richard was not harmed by the possessed's fire, as the man at Chainbridge was not hurt by Moyo's attack. Clearly these men possess some very powerful abilities of their own. The one at Chainbridge mentioned that they observe humanity, and Richard certainly seemed very curious about the Alchemist. He mentions that he knew Oscar Wilde, meaning that he must be impossibly old. He also does not appear to be afraid of death, as he remains on the planet as the ironberg falls towards him. This suggests that either he is already dead and has found a way to return from the beyond as often as he likes, or that he will not be killed by the ironberg. If the latter is true, he must be more powerful than anything that the reader has encountered so far in the books. Who or what are these strange beings and what is their purpose? If they are simply observing, why become involved in events at all? These beings do not appear to be aggressive or dangerous for now, but their motivations and plans remain a mystery. The author is setting up a new puzzle to be explored further in the next book, and perhaps hints at the 'destiny' of mankind that the Kiint spoke to Syrinx about.

Finally, Quinn's terrible plans for Nyvan are revealed and carried out. In the same chapter, both the Organization and Quinn unleash appalling destruction on Nyvan. The



Organization is responsible for the falling ironberg and the space-battle involving frigates and voidhawks, but Quinn's destructive power is much worse. Quinn not only begins a war among the various opposing factions of Nyvan that will feasibly last a long time before any kind of resolution is reached, he also blows up an asteroid that will rain down fragments on the planet. Each fragment has a destructive potential hundreds of times greater than the ironberg. Compared to Quinn, Capone's Organization comes off looking rather puny. Quinn's power to utterly destroy a planet in this way, and to inflict eternal night upon it, makes him seem more like a god than a man. As he gazes down from space on the destruction he has wrought, it is not so hard for the reader to believe that he could be the evil prophet of some vengeful and deranged god. Quinn's method of destruction is heavily symbolic of his religious beliefs. First, he has taken advantage of the worst aspects of man's nature and turned it against him. He was only responsible for creating the spark that led to the conflict that has broken out between the different nations, so easily manipulated because the seeds of hate, separation and aggression were already there. Tempting humans to give in to these destructive elements of their nature is one of the characteristics of the Devil, the god Quinn worships. By blowing up the asteroid and letting the fragments rain down on the planet, Quinn causes maximum pain and destruction, something that pleases his sadistic personality as well as his religious convictions. Finally, the fragments will throw up soot and filth that will clog the atmosphere, blocking out the sun. This will cause lasting suffering that Quinn hopes will eventually turn people to worship his god. The eternal night that will be brought about by his actions is also symbolic of the despair, pain, hopelessness and evil that Quinn brings to others. A planet that suffers an eternal night is a very fitting gift for such an evil god. It is also ironic, as the Devil Quinn worships is also referred to as Light Brother or Light Bringer by his worshipers. Quinn has brought the light of his god to Nyvan by plunging it into darkness.

Suddenly, in this chapter Quinn has gone from a minor enemy, a lone psycho causing trouble on a small scale, to a tangible, frightening threat. Quinn has been shown as a man with the power to destroy lives on a scale that no other possessed in the books has done so far, not even Capone or Kiera. If Capone was portrayed as the main enemy of humanity in this book and the last, now it is clear that Quinn actually holds that title. Capone is simply a very powerful man wishing to take over and rule worlds. Quinn has no ambitions and plans beyond causing absolute destruction and inflicting terrible suffering. Quinn seems so much worse than Capone because he cannot be reasoned with or appealed to. Quinn, with his strange religious beliefs and almost sexual need to inflict pain, is also slightly insane. Insane men are often more terrifying than the sane because they are completely unpredictable. Who knows what Quinn will do next in his aim to convert all humanity to Devil-worship? Quinn, unlike Capone, has the ability to sneak onto any planet unnoticed, and will be completely underestimated by everyone who faces him. Unlike Capone he is bent only on destruction, without the need to consolidate or pander to political allies. In this chapter, the author has set up Quinn as one of the main enemies that will need to be defeated in the next book.



# Chapter 12, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict

## Chapter 12, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Summary

The Deadnights' ship makes contact with the Mindor, a blackhawk turned hellhawk possessed by Rocio Condra. The Deadnights transfer over to the Mindor. Inside their cabin, Gerald reveals to Beth that Kiera is possessing his daughter, Marie. Rocio overhears and wonders how he can use this information to take down Kiera.

On Ombey, Stephanie, her friends and the children have reached the military border between the possessed and the living. Stephanie approaches one of the soldiers with a white flag and one comes forward to talk to her. After communicating with Princess Kirsten Saldana, the soldier thanks Stephanie and lets the children pass. As the kids say their last goodbyes, the soldier warns Stephanie to get far away from the border. Stephanie and her friends are a little worried by this, and agree that they must stick together from now on.

The spaceplane docks with the Lady Mac, and they fly clear of Nyvan. The agents decide that Tranquillity would be the best place for Mzu, but Mzu tells them that the Alchemist is not secure. They will have to go destroy it. She explains that when their ships were attacked many years ago, they only had enough patterning nodes to allow one ship to jump out. It was agreed that Mzu and others would jump back to inhabited space and that the Beezling and its crew would fly to an agreed upon system. Without jump capabilities, it would take the Beezling around twenty-eight years to get there. The Beezling would be untraceable while on route. This is why the Alchemist has never been found before now, but now that the Beezling should have arrived, the weapon is no longer secure. The plan had been for Mzu and other survivors to rendezvous with the Beezling in that system in twenty-eight years to collect the Alchemist. This means that several people know where to find it, including Ikela. Joshua and the agents agree that they must destroy the weapon, and Mzu gives Joshua the coordinate. Meanwhile, Capone's men shout into the beyond for a soul who knows where the Alchemist is. Ikela replies, and is allowed to possess a new body.

Oenone arrives at Tranquillity and Syrinx informs Ione that Meredith Saldana is here to visit her. Meredith tells her the plan to use Tranquillity as a base for their ambush of Capone at Toi-Hoi. Ione is a little reluctant at first, but agrees to the plan. However, unknown to them, Capone has just been made aware of their plans to ambush him.

Athene says goodbye to Sinon before he leaves for Ombey. He is one of the Edenists who have volunteered to put his personality into a serjeant to help liberate Mortonridge. Athene is angry with him, feeling that this goes against everything Edenism stands for.





## Chapter 12, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Analysis

At last, it seems as though Gerald's plans to help Kiera are getting somewhere. Now that he is so close to his goal, he only just realizes how hard things are really going to be. All Gerald's plans revolved around getting to Kiera, but he has no idea what to do when he does. Naturally, he confides in Beth, a girl who has become a surrogate daughter and mother in one to him. Beth is understandably shocked at the revelation. Now that she knows the truth, perhaps Beth will be able to help Gerald free Marie. Beth's newly found confidence and practical attitude will help counter Gerald's impulsive one. It also seems that help may come from a very unlikely source: the possessed themselves. Rocio is listening in to their conversation and hears everything. Rather than warn the other possessed or worry about how to deal with Gerald, he immediately wonders how he might use the information to take down Kiera. If all three can work together, perhaps there is actually some hope that they may succeed.

Rocio Condra is an interesting soul, unusual in that he does not fear open space. For most souls, space reminds them too much of the sensory-deprived void of the beyond. For Rocio, space represents the freedom he longs for. He actually enjoys being a hellhawk, unlike many of the other hellhawks who are simply carrying out a job for Kiera, hoping for a human body as a reward when they are done. Rocio is one of the souls who sees his new life as a completely new existence, a chance to experience new things and to enjoy adventures beyond any he ever had before. He can achieve things in this new body, with his energistic abilities, which he could never have hoped for in his previous life. Rocio longs for absolute freedom without limits. He has no ambitions as other possessed do to gain power, take over worlds or try to relive his old life. The inside of his hellhawk reflects these wishes. The decoration looks like the inside of a steam-punk submarine, all plush carpets, brass appliances and portholes. There is even a faint smell of the sea. For Rocio, space is like the sea, representing freedom and adventure. The submarine interior symbolizes the exploration he would love to be doing, were it not for Kiera holding him back. His exterior, looking like a huge winged bird, also represents the limitless freedom that he longs for. By using this imagery, Rocio can also connect to a sense of the past, a fantasy he can relate to, instead of the alien unfamiliarity of the voidhawk. Rocio does not want to feel like a possessor of something that exists independently of him, but as an entirely autonomous creature, free to enjoy his new life as he wishes.

For Stephanie and her friends on Ombey, the question of what to do with their lives has also come up. Transporting the children to safety gave them a purpose, a sense of justice and morality that made them feel better about their stolen bodies and new lives. Now that the children have been delivered to the living, they must come up with a new purpose. Stephanie has already expressed the fears attached to living forever, and the others have observed how unsustainable possessed society in Mortonridge really is. There is a sense of dissatisfaction behind many of the possessed. They do not want to suffer in the beyond anymore, but neither do they want to return to the banalities and pains of life. Like Rocio, they would love to be free, but circumstances limit them.



Stephanie and her friends also know that their existence is inevitably going to be shortlived. It is extremely unlikely that the living will be able to live peacefully alongside the possessed on the planet. At some point, the two factions will come into conflict again, and as the soldier warned Stephanie to get far away, it looks as though this will be sooner rather than later.

The readers are put into an uncomfortable and difficult position in this chapter, as they are made to feel concern for the safety of the possessed. Stephanie and her friends have helped to save the lives of almost seventy children, and are very likeable characters. They do not exhibit the same aggressive or hedonistic natures as some of the more despicable possessed do, but appear to be trying to live their lives as peaceably as possible. The reader has grown to like them, and does not wish to see them injured or killed. When Stephanie walks towards the soldiers with her white flag, there is a very good chance that they will shoot her. The reader is very relieved when they do not. When the soldier and Princess Kirsten question why the possessed are helping the children and what they want in return, the reader can feel indignant with Stephanie. When the soldier warns Stephanie and her friends to get as far away from the border as they can, we instantly know he is referring to the liberation of Mortonridge, which will occur soon. We have seen the preparations being made for the campaign and know what is in store for the possessed. The use of bitek serjeants to combat them will be brutal and uncompromising. Again, the reader feels fear for Stephanie and her friends, perhaps even hoping that they will somehow escape this fate. This is an uncomfortable position for the reader, as most of the characters we are made to sympathize with are living humans who have suffered massively at the hands of the possessed. Throughout the books we have witnessed the appalling actions of the possessed, and have come to think of them as the enemy. Stephanie and her friends, and other possessed such as Fletcher, seem to defy this easy view. However, Stephanie, Fletcher and all other possessed have still stolen the bodies they now inhabit. The original occupants of the bodies are made to suffer, trapped in their own bodies. Any question as to whether this is an unpleasant experience or not is answered by the destroyed mind of Gerald Skibbow. Stephanie and her friends may seem like good, altruistic people, but they are certainly not blameless or above cruelty. Given the incredible suffering that souls undergo in the beyond, can these crimes be forgiven? Here, the author is showing his reader that morality is never simply black and white.

After giving the reader a reason to sympathize with some of the possessed on Ombey, we are shown in the same chapter one of the men who will be fighting them. Sinon is another character that we can sympathize with, as a peaceful, compassionate Edenist who loves his wife and daughter. Although his personality has been placed into a bitek serjeant, the medical nanonic packages on his body show that he is not invulnerable in this form. If Sinon comes into conflict with Stephanie and her friends, as seems inevitable, the reader will be torn as to who they wish to see triumphant. It seems that Athene might be correct, that the war is not justified or morally right. If both sides in a conflict can be sympathized with, perhaps there should be no conflict at all. However, it is also clear that the souls trapped inside their own bodies by the possessed cannot be abandoned. The possessors have had their chance at life already. Surely it would be wrong not to attempt to help the innocent souls of the living who are not being given the



same chance? What may have seemed like a very simple battle of good against evil in earlier books has become a very complicated matter.

Athene not only feels that conflict of this nature is beneath the Edenists, she also feels that Sinon should not attempt to experience life once more. He is dead, and though he might enjoy consciousness within the multiplicity, he is not entitled to live again. This sentiment is certainly influenced by the terrible examples of the possessed, but might also come from her fears about Edenist souls. Athene is now sure that what the Kiint said was true, that Edenist memory simulacrum are not the same as a person's soul. It is ironic that though she states this belief, she still fears for the memory simulacrum of Sinon. Sinon disagrees with her, believing that the Kiint are looking at Edenism with a too simplistic view. If habitat personalities possess souls, then so must Edenist's memories, as a habitat personality is made up of the combined memories of many Edenists. If this is true, does it follow that Edenists never die, instead becoming a part of a new life? If this is the case, then what happens to the souls of Edenists who are not lucky enough to have their memories stored in time? Will Sinon's soul include the experiences that he will find on Ombey, or will it only consist of his current memories, suspended in the multiplicity?

In chapter 12, the shell surrounding Mzu's character finally begins to break, offering the reader an insight into the deeper feelings and motivations that drive her. For the first time, Mzu expresses regret for ever having built the Alchemist. She is finally really able to admit her mistake, though the revelation has come a little late, as Monica points out: "Now you realize what a mistake you made, now people are dying just to keep your precious arse safe" (pg. 475.) It has taken a great deal of death and destruction for Mzu to admit guilt, and the reader cannot help but wonder if she only regrets her failure, rather than a deeper sense of moral accountability. If weren't for the possessed, if Alkad had managed to detonate her weapon, would she now regret her actions? It takes the fear of having her own weapon used against her, or against the wrong victims, for her to realize what a danger it truly is. This would probably be of little comfort to the Omutans she was so ready to see suffer. Revenge is a pursuit that seems to blind people to everything else. Mzu could not see that retaliating against the Omutans would make her just as wrong as they were, and that the Omutans are really not so different from the Garissans. Mzu also does not seem to care much for the suffering her revenge mission has caused along the way. This includes the random people she has killed such as Cherri Barnes or Prince Lambert, to the completely unrelated victims, such as anyone who suffered as a result of the antimatter that she sold all those years ago. Mzu may now regret building the Alchemist, but she has not gone nearly far enough in her remorse to begin to make up for what she has done.

Now, however, there appears to be another side to Mzu's character and her motivations. Mzu reveals that her husband, Peter Adul, was left on the Beezling all these years. It seems that Mzu's obsession with revenge might have been fuelled by more than just hate, but also by a deep desperation to save the man she loves. If this is the case, are her actions any more forgivable? Is love a better reason than hate to carry out such atrocities? It seems unlikely that Mzu would agree to leave her husband behind, no matter how intent on harming Omuta she was. Rather than, we can imagine that this



decision was forced on her by the Garissan Navy, who left Peter on the Beezling to ensure her loyalty later. If this is the case, it would go a long way to explaining how Mzu has ended up the way she is. The war with Omuta had ruined her life in two ways. First, her planet was destroyed. Second, her husband was taken from her for twenty-eight years, with no way of knowing if he will survive the long period of stasis on the broken ship. No wonder Mzu feels such hatred towards Omuta, who she has naturally chosen to blame rather than her own people. No wonder she is so intent on retrieving the Alchemist and finding her husband again. And no wonder that she has formed a cold, hard, ruthless personality. After what was inflicted upon her, she will have had to learn to harden herself in order to cope. As other Garissan survivors have been able to settle down and form new lives, to grow comfortable and forget their hatred of Omuta, Mzu has had to wait, worried and alone. All this time she has been anticipating just one thing, her mission to rescue of Peter. Although Mzu's actions might not be forgivable, they are finally understandable.

On Tranquillity, Jay and Hailie play without any of the concerns or conflict that beset other characters and nations in the novel. Unlike adults, children are much more capable of forming friendships despite differences. To children, the barriers that adults often put up around themselves would seem nonsensical. Jay and Hailie are able to play with each other peaceably and happily. These children represent the innocent and vulnerable aspects of human nature that are so under threat from all the different conflicts of the book. Their simple, innocent play is sharply contrasted with the brutality and cruelty elsewhere in the story, making the latter seem all the worse. The scene in which Jay and Hailie build fragile sandcastles on the beach is symbolic of the wider situation they are in, as the adults try to form fragile alliances around them, with the unrelenting sea advancing ever closer to wash them away. The scene highlights the fragility of Tranquillity, making the reader fear for it and everyone inside, knowing that Capone's ships are on their way.

However, once again the reader is given a hint that there is something special, something very different about Tranquillity that marks it out from all other places in the Confederation. Ione and Tranquillity have both insisted that this is the safest place to be, the one place the possessed will not capture. These hints foreshadow the disappearance of the habitat at the end of the book, when the reader must question what exactly has happened to Tranquillity.



# Chapter 13, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict

## Chapter 13, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Summary

Quinn's ship arrives at Earth and begins to dock with the Supra-Brazil asteroid, connected to Earth by a giant tower. Passenger elevators and cargo platforms go up and down on lifts between the asteroid and Earth. As they approach the asteroid, Quinn kills Dwyer. When the ship arrives it is vigorously searched by the Govcentral Internal Security Directorate or GISD, who find the mutilated body of Dwyer, but no one else onboard. Invisible, Quinn slips past all the security checks and materializes to enter the lift capsule's lounge, disguised as a businessman. He begins to descend to Earth.

The Mindor approaches Valisk with the Deadnights. Onboard, Jed goes to find Beth and walks in on her in bed with Gerald. She is fully dressed, having fallen asleep while trying to comfort him, but Jed runs away in anger before she can explain. The Mindor arrives at Valisk to find that it is gone. The voidhawks explain to Rocio what happened and offer for him to join them. He refuses, deciding to try Capone instead. He needs nutrient fluids to stay alive, only available from habitats and some asteroid stations, so his options at this point are very limited. He communicates with the two possessed onboard, who all agree not to tell the Deadnight kids of their change of destination.

Ralph Hiltch arrives back at Ombey, where preparations are being made for the massive combined effort to rid Mortonridge of the possessed. He has been made chief strategic coordination officer, in charge of the whole liberation mission. He travels to inspect the barrier, and there Annette Ekelund is waiting to talk to him. She tells him any efforts against the possessed are pointless, but he says he believes humanity will win out. She walks away, and the red cloud descends to form a physical barrier between the possessed and the living.

Jay is playing with Hailie, and the two get on to the subject of religion. Jay mentions the Tyrathca Sleeping God that Kelly saw the Tyrathca on Lalonde worshipping. She then tries to explain the concept of gods to Hailie but quickly gives up. Hailie says she will ask her parents. Later that night, Kelly Tirrel is in her room running an illegal virtual reality program. She has become addicted to them lately, and is not looking after herself very well anymore. Lieria, one of the Kiint on Tranquillity, comes to visit her and asks to buy the full recording of her time on Lalonde with nothing edited out. Kelly asks for a million fuseodollars and the Kiint agrees. It pays, and then leaves with the recording.

Ione and Tranquillity search for what Lieria could have been after, while Kelly visits Jay to ask what she has been talking to Hailie about recently. The two reach the same conclusion, that the Kiint are interested in the Tyrathca Sleeping God. Kelly, Ione and the scientists from the Laymil research project discuss the Tyrathca god, concluding that



there is actually a good chance that it could be a real entity or construct. If a highly literal race thinks it could help them against the possessed, then perhaps it can do the same for humanity. They have just decided that they will have to ask the Tyrathca themselves, when Tranquillity suddenly comes under attack. A huge Organization fleet is attacking the Confederation forces at the habitat. Then Capone's ships fire a salvo of combat wasps straight at Tranquillity.

## Chapter 13, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Analysis

Chapter 13 is one that mainly sets up situations ready for the next book. Many of the things seen, done and discussed here will have far-reaching consequences later. The author sets scenes, creates tension and suspense, and then leaves the reader with various cliffhangers.

The voidhawk Mindor has reached Valisk only to find that it has disappeared. The voidhawks explain the situation and then offer for him to join them. The Edenists are willing to accept the hellhawk, to feed it and look after it, if it will help them research the possessed. The Edenists respond very differently to the possessed than the Adamists, with upfront offers rather than violence. Whereas the Confederation Navy and the Kulu Kingdom captured their possessed forcefully to experiment on, the Edenists will only take Rocio if he agrees to go with them peaceably. This is not just a less violent solution, it is also a slightly more practical one, given the difficulties that both the Navy and the Kulu Kingdom had containing their captives. Although the Edenists are engaged in the same war, they do not stoop to or condone the practices used by their allies. However, it is questionable how much freedom Rocio would really experience with the Edenists. As Rocio's main wish is to be free and independent, he would not wish to effectively become their prisoner. He has only two options: the Edenists or Capone. At least with Capone he will be working with his own kind, and will have the chance to get away. He also does not want to help the Edenists come up with a solution to possession, as the last thing he wants is to leave his new body. He does not see that perhaps working together they can find an answer that would satisfy both parties. There is too much distrust between living and possessed at this point.

Rocio, then, chooses to go to Capone. Ironically, this will actually take Gerald closer to Kiera than getting to Valisk would have done. At last things are really starting to come together for Gerald, in such a neat way that it almost seems as if fate must be guiding him. However, the Organization is also one of the most dangerous places for the living to go at this time, and it will certainly not be easy to get at Kiera right under Capone's nose. Perhaps working together, Gerald, Beth and Rocio will be able to succeed. This is one of the cliffhangers of the book that seems to be rounded off with some hope for the future, though probably not for the other poor Deadnight kids onboard.

If the cliffhanger involving Gerald seemed potentially hopeful, the fate of Earth looks much gloomier. Quinn has now made it into a capsule that is taking him to Earth. With his new abilities, he can turn invisible and evade even the most stringent of security



checks. There seems little hope that the Earth authorities will be able to stop him, if they even realize he is there before it is too late. After the destruction of Nyvan, the reader can be left in no doubt of Quinn's plans for Earth. He is only interested in spreading the work of his god by inflicting pain and suffering over the entire planet. Quinn's sadistic personality is highlighted perfectly by the murder of Dwyer, a loyal supporter who Quinn cast aside without a second thought. He could have simply executed Dwyer cleanly and quickly, but instead Quinn chose to kill him in the goriest way possible. The security officials of Supra-Brazil find the ship's bridge completely coated in blood, and an eyeball drifts past the window. It sounds as though Quinn has blown Dwyer up, or sliced him into a million pieces. This level of brutality is unnecessary and deranged. Quinn's need for pain and violence is only increasing. This method of killing Dwyer only serves to highlight the fact that there were possessed aboard the ship, but Quinn does not care if he raises the suspicions of Earth's security. Rather, it seems as though Quinn wants them to know he is there. He wants them to be terrified of him, hoping to seed panic and despair. Quinn's ego would never allow him to pass through unnoticed. Now that Quinn has destroyed Nyvan in such a mighty fashion, he feels himself elevated almost to the level of a god, and wants every person he encounters to feel respect, awe and fear. The scene has been set for the next book. Quinn's next target is Earth and he will not let it suffer quietly. This cliffhanger is left on a very sinister note.

The scene is also set in this chapter for the showdown between the possessed and the living on Ombey. Ralph and Ekelund discuss the reasons for the conflict that is coming. Ekelund believes that humanity is doomed, as people are essentially nasty and violent. Ralph, in contrast, believes that people can be good and loving, and that there is definitely hope for humanity. He uses the example of Stephanie Ash to show Ekelund that even the possessed can exhibit altruistic behavior, and that not all her own kind agrees with her gloomy appraisal of the situation. Ekelund's belief in the cruelty of human nature is for her reflected in the terrible actions and memories of the souls in the beyond, the suffering endured there, and the conflict that surrounds humans wherever they are, possessed or not. She describes the liberation of Mortonridge as a "monstrous diversion" (pg. 514), a "crusade", and a "pointless war" (pg. 513.) Ekelund believes that to fight to the death over the lives of the living is pointless and counter-intuitive. They will only be killing those they have come to save. Ralph, on the other hand, believes that not trying to fight would be the worse action. The living souls deserve at least the attempt to be saved. The most peaceful option, with the least loss of life, would indeed be to let the possessed live quietly with their new bodies, but this would be to abandon the living. He also feels that the hope inspired by winning the conflict will outweigh the negatives. Perhaps Ralph is also driven by the need for revenge and closure after the terrible things he has witnessed the possessed do. Ekelund sees only the political motivations, so for her the war is entirely unjustified. Both sides might find the better solution would be to work together, to study the nature of the beyond in order to find a way for the souls to escape it. Ralph expresses this wish, wondering what they could accomplish if only they could join forces, but neither side will cooperate. It also seems unlikely that the possessed will ever give up their new bodies now. Whether or not the war is morally justifiable, it seems like the only possible response. The next book will explore the consequences of this decision. This cliff-hanger seems neither hopeful nor sinister, but inevitable.



As Ekelund walks away, the red cloud hovering over Ombey descends to ground-level, sealing off the possessed inside a bubble of their raging emotions. The red cloud represents the possessed's fear of open space and the beyond, but also their desire to be left alone in their own little world. They want to cut themselves off from the world and concerns of the living and try to begin an entirely new existence. The sealing of the cloud is symbolic of them shutting themselves away from everything else, from outside concerns, and from death and possession. They do not want to deal with these problems anymore. This is a clear statement to the living: keep out and leave us alone. As Ralph states, it seems like the door has just been slammed shut. The red cloud also represents the possessed's combined determination and resistance. They will fight to remain in their new bodies and lives, and are not going to give up easily.

One very important theme is set up for the next book in this chapter, and that is religion. Lone and the scientists discuss the Tyrathca god and how it may be relevant to the threat of the possessed. They assume that the god must be some kind of construct or phenomenon that the Tyrathca have encountered. Lone and the scientists do not even seem to consider the possibility that it could actually be a god. This is very cynical, and perhaps a little patronizing. If an advanced and highly literal race found no other explanation for it, then there is a strong possibility that it may actually be a god. Either way, what are the implications for humanity? Lone and the scientists assume that whatever was encountered will help humanity too, but that is a little arrogant and by no means assured. If it is the weapon or construct of another race, will this only mean more conflict for humanity? If the Sleeping God is actually a god, does it care for and support all life or only the Tyrathca? Will it help against the possessed or refuse to become involved? Will it turn on humanity? It is interesting that the Tyrathca were absolutely certain that the god would be able to hear them, and yet it has not helped yet. This suggests that it either cannot or will not help. Lone and the scientists conclude that they will have to try to find the information from the Tyrathca, but this is a dangerous course. If the Tyrathca were willing to cut off all contact with humanity because of the possessed, they will not welcome any humans in their system. Given the Tyrathcas' hostile reaction to Kelly's questions about their god, they also might not respond well to enquiries. Humanity would not want to start a religious conflict with the Tyrathca. The author has set up one more mystery that will need to be solved in the final books.





# Chapter 14, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict

## Chapter 14, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Summary

Louise, Genevieve and Fletcher arrive at the High York asteroid and disembark. Fletcher asks Louise to promise that she will go after Quinn, should Fletcher be captured or killed. She agrees. At the spaceport they are met by a customs officer, who leads them into a room full of armed men. It is clear that they know Fletcher is possessed. The girls are terrified, but Fletcher says that he will not resist arrest.

The Lady Mac arrives at the star system containing the ship Beezling, and the Alchemist. The Beezling is damaged but still intact, and the majority of its crew still alive, including the captain and Peter Adul. Captain Prager at first refuses to let them approach anywhere near the Alchemist, threatening to kamikaze first. Joshua convinces him to let them transfer everyone on the Beezling over to the Lady Mac, then scuttle the Beezling with the Alchemist still attached. Suddenly, two Organization ships, the Urschel and the Raimo, arrive in the system. They are far off for now, but are blocking the Lady Mac's escape route, which is too close to the gas giant to jump out. Joshua demands to know how the Alchemist works. He claims that he will stay on Tranquillity for the rest of his life if he has to, but he needs to know what the Alchemist can do in order to save them. The agents agree, and Mzu datavises the file over to him. Joshua immediately begins to devise a plan.

Ashly retrieves the Alchemist and the passengers from the Beezling, bringing them back to the Lady Mac. Mzu greets her husband, Peter, with trepidation, and then throws herself into his arms. As the Organization ships close in, Joshua launches the Alchemist at the gas giant, setting it to its most destructive capabilities. He then flies away quickly as Capone's ships pursue him. As Joshua pushes up the gees to accelerate away, more of the passengers are forced to put themselves into temporary stasis. The Alchemist begins a chain of explosions within the gas giant, which erupt in huge bursts up into space, threatening the ships. Their only hope is to keep on course in the hope that they can get past before another burst. Joshua hopes that he will be able to make it, but that Capone's ships will not, and he is right. The next eruption releases a huge fireball that completely destroys the Organization ships. Joshua commits the remaining crew and himself to zero-tau, after setting the Lady Mac's antimatter drive to accelerate out of danger at forty-two gees.

After six hundred seconds the gees drop back down to tolerable levels and Joshua is released from stasis. He jumps the ship away just before the gas giant goes nova. The ship jumps straight to Tranquillity, only to find that it has completely vanished, leaving only the debris of a massive combat wasp battle behind. Joshua assumes the worst, but



Sarha points out that there is not enough wreckage for the habitat to have been destroyed. It has simply disappeared.

## Chapter 14, The Neutronium Alchemist: Conflict Analysis

The final chapter offers the reader a resolution to the Alchemist plot thread, while setting up a couple more cliffhangers for the next book. Just when it looked as though Louise, Genevieve and Fletcher had made it through customs safely, they are stopped and arrested. The reader is left to wonder what will become of Fletcher, as Earth's security are not likely to believe that he is trying to help them. Earth's security has been described at various points in the book as extremely strict and tough, and we can imagine that Fletcher will be dealt with very harshly. The reader must also wonder what will happen to Louise and Genevieve, as collaborators with the enemy. They might be seen as traitors, and either imprisoned or sent to a penal colony. On the other hand, if Louise can convince Earth's security that Quinn is a danger they must take very seriously, perhaps there is hope that he can be stopped.

The second cliffhanger set up at the end of this chapter is the disappearance of Tranquillity. It is clear that the habitat has not been destroyed, so what can have happened to it? Earlier in the book, both Norfolk and Valisk vanished. In both cases they were removed from the universe. Perhaps this is what has caused Tranquillity to disappear. Perhaps Lone was able to shift Tranquillity in the same manner as Rubra shifted Valisk. However, Rubra merged with Dariat, using the reality dysfunction ability of the possessed in order to move his habitat, a feat that Lone is unlikely to be able to copy. The most likely explanation seems to be that the possessed took over Tranquillity and moved it themselves, but if that is the case then they did so extraordinarily quickly. It is also a little mysterious that only the wreckage of combat wasps remains. How could that many wasps launched at the habitat have caused no damage at all? Lone and Tranquillity were also adamant that it would be impossible for the possessed to take over the habitat, and that Tranquillity is possibly the safest place to be. Lone has also made mysterious references to some secret power or ability of the habitat at various points in the book. Perhaps Tranquillity's disappearance has something to do with this ability, and Lone has managed to elude Capone's forces after all. The author has left the question hanging, ready to be answered in the next book.

Finally, Mzu, Joshua and the agents all seem to be cooperating, and Joshua even seems to be beginning to resolve his problems with Liol. Having experienced loss, fear, pain and destruction on an enormous scale on Nyvan, it appears that these main characters have finally realized what really matters. The petty squabbles of different governments and factions, as well as Mzu's plans for revenge, no longer seem important in the face of much greater troubles and concerns. Now, the characters are able to trust each other and work together towards their shared goal, to destroy the Alchemist. No one questions Joshua's control of his ship and his authority when they are aboard her, deferring to his decisions and looking to him for guidance. However, Joshua also understands that when it comes to Mzu and the Alchemist, he must allow



Monica and Samuel an equal input. Monica, Samuel and Mzu, who at the beginning of the book would never have dreamed of allowing anyone else access to information on the Alchemist, actually trust Joshua enough to allow him to read the file. Monica also realizes that she must trust Joshua to watch over Mzu when she puts herself into stasis, unable to cope with the ship's ten gees. When Joshua jokes that Liol would enjoy piloting the ship if he is forced to remain on Tranquillity, Liol states that Joshua is the captain of Lady Macbeth. He understands this and does not wish to challenge it. Mzu also seems to have given up on her fierce independence, at last realizing that the problems of the galaxy far outweigh her own petty concerns, and that she has been too arrogant thinking she can handle everything alone. Though it has taken a whole book, it seems that these characters have finally been able to resolve or let go of their differences to begin to work together.

In this chapter, the reader also begins to see the vulnerable woman beneath Mzu's hard exterior. We have already seen that her revenge mission may have been partly or wholly motivated by the need to rescue her husband. Now Mzu finally achieves this particular goal, as she and Peter are reunited. Mzu is at first apprehensive, wondering if he will still love her and whether her own love has lasted all this time. After being separated from him for twenty-eight years, she does not know if it is merely the memory of him that she treasures. She wonders if love can be sustained without the continual presence of the person in question. She also worries that the age difference between them might stand in their way. Peter has been kept in stasis in zero-tau, so has not aged a day. He is still thirty-five while she is sixty years old. Suddenly, the audience realizes the true extent of the sacrifice that Mzu was forced to make. It seems that Mzu's worries were unfounded, however, as the mere sight of Peter brings so many emotions flooding back that she throws herself into his arms. This is a very different Mzu from the woman we have seen at any other point in the books. Here she is vulnerable, unsure and questioning, then overcome with emotion and love. At last she can drop her defenses and begin to try rebuilding her lost life. This is also a very touching picture of how enduring and conquering love can be, that the years of absence, the age difference, and the terrible situation they now find themselves in are not enough to lessen her or Peter's love. This stands in sharp contrast to Joshua's own faithless, promiscuous behavior. Joshua has always avoided these kinds of deep attachments, but perhaps the time for that kind of behavior is over. Will the horrific ordeals he has lived through influence him to find something deeper and lasting?

At last, the reader finds out exactly what the Alchemist can do, and begins to understand why everyone has been so frightened of it. The Alchemist really is a doomsday weapon, with the power to turn a sun into a black hole, or to make it go nova. Joshua uses the latter setting on the gas giant, and a terrifying example of the weapon's destructive capabilities follows. The science behind the Alchemist is a little complicated, but here the author is trying to satisfy science fiction fans who like such technology to at least be theoretically possible. The long descriptions of how the Alchemist works also serve to emphasize just how dangerous and destructive it is. It seems that the Alchemist uses the patterning node technology that allows starships to create wormholes, with the zero-tau technology that will freeze anything in stasis. Set to its most destructive setting, it will begin to create a singularity, but freeze just before this stage is reached. This



results in an object of the highest possible density, which compresses all matter around it into neutronium. The energy this gives off will cause a star, or gas giant in this case, to go nova. The science does not need to be understood to appreciate the destructive effects of the weapon, as its effects are experienced by the characters in this chapter. The weapon has the power to quickly cause the gas giant to explode in a huge nuclear reaction. If this were done to the sun of an inhabited system, all life in that system would be quickly destroyed. Such a weapon in the hands of any government is a terrifying thought, but in the hands of the possessed it could be truly cataclysmic. If two factions were to acquire the weapon and begin to use it against each other, all life in the galaxy could easily be wiped out. It is no wonder that so many governments were anxious to make sure nobody else got hold of this technology.

The Alchemist also has a more 'humane' setting. This setting will create a singularity, but freeze it in place before a wormhole opens, effectively turning the weapon into a mini black-hole. If fired into a sun, it will eventually pull in the entire star. This will not cause any destructive explosions or harmful radiation, but slowly obliterate a system's sun, its source of life. Any inhabitants of the system will be forced to abandon their planet, but will have plenty of time to do so. Lives will be destroyed, but not lost. This is what Mzu had intended to do to Omuta's sun. The Omutans would have become homeless wanderers, forced to abandon their planet. Their culture would inevitably have become fragmented and scattered around other systems, until the concept of an 'Omutan' ceased to exist. Though this may be a more 'humane' option as it does not aim for loss of life, it is still an extremely destructive and cruel one. It is a disaster that the Omutans would never be able to recover from. It is also a very symbolic form of revenge, as it would force the Omutans to evacuate and disperse, losing their identity and their culture in much the same way as the Garissans did. For Mzu, who was forced into exile on a strange habitat, far away from her husband, with no chance of returning to the life she loved, this would seem like the ideal retribution. Mzu might not consider herself to be in the wrong, but she created a weapon that could be used on such a destructive scale that she must have understood the dangers. She cannot guarantee that everyone who uses the weapon will choose its 'humane' setting. In fact, we have no way of knowing what the weapon might have been used for, had Garissa not been destroyed. Would the Garissan Navy have blown up Omuta's sun rather than extinguish it? Even if only used on the 'humane' setting, just two different factions using it against each other would quickly wipe out whole systems. This would lead to huge migrations of people that would inevitably drain and ruin other systems. Mzu did not think about the possible far reaching consequences of what she had created, and is only now beginning to realize what a mistake she has made.

The chapter ends with the destruction of the weapon inside the nuclear explosion of the gas giant. However, once the weapon has been used, it is impossible to put the technology back into Mzu's mind and keep it there. From studying its effects, other scientists will most likely be able to re-create the Alchemist some day in the future. For now, the implications and dangers of the possessed are occupying most governments' resources. However, the threat of the Alchemist, and other weapons like it, will always lurk in the background.



# Characters

## Joshua (or Josh) Calvert

"If anyone gets hostile with Lady Mac, they just crash straight into his ego." (Sarha describing Joshua, Chapter 14, p551)

Joshua is the captain of the starship Lady Macbeth, which he inherited from his father. In this book, he is searching for the scientist Alkad Mzu in order to return her to Tranquillity before she can carry out her plans for revenge. He is doing this at the behest of Lone, the ruler of Tranquillity. During the search it becomes apparent that the main priority must be to keep Mzu's super-weapon out of the hands of the possessed. In order to do this, the various people hunting Mzu must learn to trust each other and work together. This is something that Joshua finds very difficult at first, as he is used to relying only on himself and his crew. Joshua hates to feel like he needs or depends on any other person. He values his independence and freedom above all else. Although he trusts his own crew implicitly, he finds it very hard to work with others on an equal footing. He likes to be in charge, doing things his own way. This is why he reacts to the appearance of his brother Liol so badly, as he does not wish to share authority or have limits put on his freedom. By the end of the book, Samuel, Monica, Mzu and Liol manage to work together with Joshua successfully, but only through accepting Joshua's authority as captain of his ship.

Joshua might be seen as the main hero of the book. Although he, Mzu and the agencies are working together by the end, it is Joshua's quick thinking and skills as a starship captain that pull them through some very dangerous situations. By the end of the book, Joshua has saved the lives of many of the characters, as well as ensured that the Alchemist does not fall into the hands of the possessed. He achieves all this without compromising his ideals or resorting to brutality. Joshua is the character that can pull off the seemingly impossible, and get out of any sticky situation. He is also incredibly handsome and charismatic, capable of charming or seducing most women he meets. However, Joshua's prowess does not come without a sense of arrogant self-satisfaction, as Sarha points out. Joshua is the sort of cheeky character who seems to be able to get away with anything.

For Joshua, the Lady Macbeth represents freedom and adventure. Joshua will never be content to remain in one place, always longing to travel and experience new things. Joshua sees himself as an independent, free young man who cannot be tied down. This is why Joshua is so afraid that he will be required to remain on Tranquillity now that he knows the secret of the Alchemist. For Joshua, Tranquillity would be a prison, and he would always long desperately to be free. This also explains why Joshua is so adamant that Liol cannot claim any rights to the ship, despite the fact that he is Joshua's elder brother. Although the Lady Mac also represents freedom and independence for Liol, by the end of the book he realizes just what the ship means to Joshua. The Lady Mac is Joshua's life, and to take it from him would be the cruelest punishment possible. In a



sense, Joshua and the Lady Mac are as inseparable as voidhawk captains are from their living ships.

Joshua enjoys casual dating and sex with a variety of different women, including lone, the ruler of Tranquillity, Louise Kavannah, and his crewmate Sarha. In this book, however, Joshua begins to question this choice of lifestyle. Before his friend Warlow died, he advised Joshua to think about the effects that his actions have on his women. This was a little shocking to Joshua, who has always thought more about having a good time than of the consequences. He is not the type of person to willingly hurt another, and probably had never considered that his actions might cause pain for the girls he dates. His attitude to women reflects his ideals of freedom and independence, as he does not wish to be tied down or feel responsible for anyone but himself. Now that Joshua is learning to trust and rely on others, and has witnessed the horrors that the universe contains, he begins to change his views. Joshua no longer seems amused by casual sex or easy women, looking down on the sex and drugs culture of the Ayacucho clubs. He also constantly compares other girls to Louise, reflecting that her innocent adoration of him was far superior to the easy sex that he can find with others. He feels a deep sense of sorrow and guilt over Louise, believing her to have been taken by the possessed when her planet fell to the enemy. He probably regrets having taken advantage of her, as she had no idea what she was really getting herself into. Unknown to Joshua, his actions have caused even greater consequences, as both Louise and lone are pregnant with his children. Joshua will have to learn to accept responsibility for others, and to value more stable relationships if he is to be a good father. His personal journey in this book brings him much closer to being able to fulfill this role. He is no longer the carefree, slightly shallow person that he was when the first book began.

## Alkad Mzu

Alkad Mzu is the scientist who invented the Alchemist super-weapon. In a war with the planet Omuta, her home world Garissa was attacked and millions of people killed. The few surviving Garissans were forced to abandon the radioactive planet, and Mzu is now seeking revenge against Omuta for her people. She plans to use her weapon on its more 'humane' setting to extinguish Omuta's sun. This will force the Omutans to evacuate and become homeless wanderers, without inflicting any huge loss of life. As she witnesses the massive destruction wrought by the possessed, Mzu begins to realize that her weapon represents a great danger to the Confederation. On the planet Nyvan, as Joshua, Samuel and Monica struggle to keep the possessed from capturing or killing her, she finally abandons her revenge mission. By the end of the book, she can admit that she made a mistake in ever creating the Alchemist, and agrees that their number one priority must be to keep it from the possessed at all costs. Whether or not Mzu's regret has come far too late, however, is up to the reader to decide. It is hard to see whether she really feels any true remorse or not.

Alkad Mzu is a complicated character whose motivations are not quite as clear as they may at first seem. She is a woman consumed by hate for the crimes of the past. Her sole purpose and mission is revenge against Omuta, and she carries out this task with a



cold determination that is very intimidating. Mzu is not afraid of sacrificing or compromising anything in pursuit of her revenge, often eliminating people once they have served their purpose, such as Cherri Barnes and Prince Lambert. She has built a weapon capable of destroying whole star systems, yet never seems to have fully thought through the consequences of this invention. She arrogantly believes that she can remain in control of her new technology, and only begins to regret her actions when she realizes the possibility of others using her weapon against her. Despite this lack of foresight, Alkad claims that she fully understands the suffering she will cause the Omutan people if her revenge plan succeeds. In fact, she says that she has thought of nothing else for thirty years. If so, this only enforces the image of Mzu as a cold, calculating, and utterly ruthless individual. In light of these observations, Mzu certainly seems to fit the role of a heartless villain.

However, as the story reaches its conclusion, a different perspective is given. It seems that Mzu's motivations were not as simple as pure revenge. Her husband, Peter Adul, has been stranded in space for twenty eight years, and only now can she rescue him. It is feasible that this situation was engineered in order to ensure Mzu's loyalty by the Garissan Navy officers that she was travelling with. Mzu has been forced to live in exile on Tranquillity, her old life destroyed, away from the man she loves, knowing that when she meets him again she will have aged almost thirty years while he remains unchanged. It is natural that Mzu would associate this terrible situation with the Omutans, blaming them for all her and her people's troubles. She also knows that the pre-arranged revenge mission against Omuta will lead to seeing her husband again. Mzu's method of revenge reflects the suffering that she and the other Garissans have endured. They have been forced to become wanderers or refugees, their society and culture destroyed. This is exactly what Mzu's plans will do to Omuta. She plans to use her weapon on 'humane' mode, instead of a more destructive setting that would destroy all life in the Omutan system. Given the genocide of her own people, it perhaps shows a great deal of restraint that Mzu was not willing to carry out such an atrocity against the Omutans. Mzu is also willing to die to ensure that her weapon cannot be used by the possessed, showing that she is brave enough to do what she believes to be right. While these points are still a long way off from justifying her actions, by the end of the book Mzu has emerged as a much more complex character. She is no longer the heartless, hard person she seemed, but a woman driven by pain and suffering to follow a misguided course, desperate to see her husband again. She can be brave, noble, focused and determined, but also cold and ruthless. Once she has set herself a particular mission, she will do anything to ensure its success. However, with her husband she also shows that she can be vulnerable and loving too.

Mzu does not fit easily into a villain or 'good guys' category. She is a complicated character who is driven by different motivations and emotions. By the end of the book, if the audience cannot sympathize with her, they have at least come to understand her.



## Quinn Dexter

Quinn Dexter is one of the main villains of the story. He is one of the possessed, yet completely different from all the others in that he has managed to regain control of his own body. As such, Quinn's body is his own, with the previously possessing soul trapped within. Despite the fact that Quinn never actually died and entered the beyond, he can still control the same energistic and reality dysfunction powers as the other possessed. In fact, Quinn is one of the strongest possessed in the book, constantly pushing to see what new abilities he can achieve. In this book, Quinn discovers the existence of ghosts. Some experiments reveal that he can push his body into the ghostly dimension, becoming invisible and undetectable to the world of the living. Though pushing into the ghost world stops his heart, Quinn's sheer strength of will and determination prevent his body from dying. He now possesses a new, sinister power, which he can use to infiltrate any planet he chooses. Quinn sets his sights on Earth, determining to bring suffering down on its people. Given his previous actions and determination, it seems highly likely that Quinn will succeed.

Quinn Dexter used to belong to a sect of Devil-worshippers on Earth, before being transported to Lalonde as a prisoner 'ivet' to work the land. After becoming possessed, he travelled to Norfolk to help bring the souls of the dead to that planet. There, Quinn managed to regain control of his body, shaming and terrifying the soul possessing him into submission. He left Norfolk shortly before the planet was removed from the universe. In this book, Quinn is on a mission to spread destruction and suffering throughout the galaxy. He sparks a conflict on Nyvan between the various opposing factions, then destroys one of its asteroids, Jesup. The fragments of the asteroid rain down on the planet, causing utter destruction and throwing up so much filth into the atmosphere that the sun is completely blocked out. Quinn then moves on to bring equal pain to Earth.

The destruction that Quinn wreaks is his offering to the god he believes in. Quinn worships the Devil, who he calls 'God's Brother', 'Light Brother', and 'Light Bringer.' This is a religion that demands its followers inflict and endure terrible pain and suffering, embracing the darker and more brutal aspects of human nature. Quinn's need for violence is not simply a product of his religious beliefs however. Rather, his religious beliefs seem to be a product of his own sadistic personality. Devil-worship justifies all Quinn's compulsive violent, brutal urges, which for him are like a kind of sexual gratification. Quinn's violence also seems to be a product of his insecurity, as he cannot abide being opposed or mocked. Whenever things do not go Quinn's way he reacts with even crueller and more sadistic behavior. Through inflicting pain and suffering on others, Quinn proves his own power and dominance over them. Quinn seems to enjoy such power above everything else, reveling in his ability to wreak destruction on such a scale on Nyvan. Due to his perverse behavior and desires, Quinn seems a much more frightening villain than Capone or the other possessed. Unlike them, Quinn's only goal is to spread his faith through causing destruction, and so he cannot be reasoned with or easily subdued. By the end of the book, after the devastating events on Nyvan, Quinn emerges as a real force to be reckoned with. He is perhaps a bigger threat to the





Confederation than any of the other characters in the books, all the worse because humanity largely remains completely unaware of the danger he poses.

## **Ione Saldana, The Lord of Ruin**

Ione Saldana is the ruler of the habitat Tranquillity. She is descended from Michael Saldana, one of the Saldana princes who broke away from the Kulu Kingdom to form his own nation. He believed that the remains of the Laymil race should be studied in order to determine whether what killed them could become a threat to humanity. For this, he required and grew a habitat, which he named Tranquillity. The other Saldanas of the Christian Kulu Kingdom were furious, as they regard Edenist bitek technology to be a sin against God. They therefore cast Michael Saldana from the family, and excommunicated him from the Christian church. The rulers of Tranquillity are often referred to as the 'Lord of Ruin', denoting their rebel status from the Saldana line, as well as their purpose as studiers of the Laymil 'Ruin Ring.' As such, Ione and Tranquillity are not regarded in the best light by the rest of the Saldana family. In this book, however, the Saldanas are forced to approach Ione with offers of an alliance, as they require her help in defeating the possessed on Ombey. Ironically, the other Saldanas are now forced to turn to bitek technology themselves if they hope to succeed. Despite this hypocrisy, and the justification of the need for the Laymil research project, the Saldanas still find it difficult to treat Ione with respect and friendship. However, instead of refusing them, or trying to use their desperation for her own gain, Ione graciously agrees to the alliance. Ione understands that the chance to forge better relationships and ties of trust between them is more important than any petty squabbles of the past.

Ione is still very young to be the ruler of an entire habitat. She handles her responsibilities with care, dignity and common sense, but it is clear that she sometimes longs for the freedom that her ordinary subjects enjoy. Ione enjoys playing on the beach with Jay and Hailie, embracing the free, innocent nature of the children's games. She wears formal clothes only for state occasions, displaying a taste for looser, floating clothes in private. She is often described in a sarong or loose dress, choosing ease and comfort over restrictive formality. She also enjoys the sea, swimming regularly and enjoying an underwater view from the window of her apartment. The sea represents all the freedom and adventure that Ione wishes she could have. This also partly explains her attraction to Joshua, as he represents the freedom she wishes she could experience. The serjeants, which have been implanted with her personality, enjoy the new experience that travelling beyond the habitat brings. Unfortunately for Ione, her responsibilities and troubles only magnify as the book progresses, as she must deal with complicated alliances, distasteful political decisions such as the support of the Mortonridge liberation, the threat of Capone's Organization, and the mysteries surrounding both the Laymil suicides and the existence of the Tyrathca Sleeping God.

Ione is a thoughtful, intelligent, compassionate, strong and independent woman. She is a very capable and successful ruler, an example of a good and benevolent political leader. Her connection to Tranquillity also makes her completely unique. No other ruler in the Kulu Kingdom or Confederation has the same connection to or complete control



over their environment. No individual Edenist enjoys such power either. Unlike Edenist habitats, Tranquillity is an entity formed of one personality, mind-linked with lone. Edenist habitats' personalities are formed from millions of Edenist memories and experiences. With affinity, every Edenist connects with the habitat, and so all Edenists are a part of their own home. Tranquillity does not share this connection with all its subjects, and can achieve a more aloof, objective relationship with them than an Edenist habitat ever could. lone is also nothing like Rubra, who forms the habitat personality of Valisk rather than simply being connected to it. Unlike lone, he is not a living human being. lone's connection to Tranquillity seems closer to that of a voidhawk captain with their living ship. However, even voidhawk captains are a part of the wider Edenist culture, connected to every other Edenist via affinity. lone's complete uniqueness means that she is very much alone, with no other person who can really relate or understand her position. Even Joshua sometimes seems to misunderstand the depth of the connection between lone and Tranquillity. lone is therefore a very isolated figure, and despite Tranquillity's friendship and attentions, she can become very lonely. Even her name, lone, is very similar to the words 'lone' and 'lonely.'

lone is not simply connected to Tranquillity. It is a part of her, forming a deep love connection unlike any normal human relationship. It is almost as if lone's soul has been split into two beings, with part of it resting in Tranquillity. At the same time, however, the two entities are completely separate. lone is an individual with her own drives and feelings, which sometimes confuse or frustrate Tranquillity. Tranquillity often takes on a parental role for lone, who is still learning to cope with her new responsibilities as the ruler of the habitat.

## Monica Foulkes

Monica Foulkes is an ESA operative, the External Security Agency of the Kulu Kingdom. Having been posted on Tranquillity for years to watch Alkad Mzu and ensure that she never leaves, she has now been tasked with tracking the renegade scientist down. She has formed a rough alliance with the Edenist intelligence operative, Samuel, in order to better carry out this mission. As this book progresses, Monica and Samuel's partnership grows into a deeper friendship, as the two learn to trust and respect each other despite their differences. This is quite an impressive feat for the representatives of two governments with such contrary views and policies. The alliance they develop is reflected on a larger scale when their two governments also decide to join forces against the possessed. If Monica and Samuel's developing friendship is symbolic of the changing attitudes of the galaxy in general, then it suggests that strong, positive bonds could form between the Edenists and the Kulu Kingdom. Samuel and Monica's friendship also shows the nonsensicality of the distrust their governments show towards each other, as the two operatives can achieve so much more working together than they could alone.

Monica is a much more impulsive and aggressive character than Samuel. Like Mzu, she is willing to do things that may seem distasteful in the pursuit of her goals. For Monica, her duty is incredibly important to her, and she will do whatever she can to succeed.



She dislikes the interference of Joshua in her plans, seeing him as an unprofessional and unnecessary nuisance. She is much more likely than Samuel to suggest the elimination of people who are getting in her way. Samuel, however, acts a little like Monica's conscience, reminding her of what is important and acceptable. His less extreme, more pacifist approaches to problems helps to cool Monica's sometimes rash behavior. In turn, Monica's relentless drive and sometimes cold practicality help Samuel to make the harder but necessary decisions. The two agents complement each other well, and they work better together than they do alone.

## Samuel

Samuel is an operative in the Edenist Intelligence Agency, who was assigned to watch Mzu in Tranquillity. Like Monica, he has now been sent to retrieve Mzu and ensure that her weapon does not fall into the wrong hands. Samuel, like most Edenists, has a deep respect for life. He is extremely reluctant to compromise any of his ideals or sense of morality in the pursuit of Mzu, and will often deter Monica from more rash or extreme actions. As an Edenist, Samuel is mind-linked via affinity with all other members of his culture. He is used to working with people who share his views and understand every thought and motivation he has. He is used to being able to instantly share and communicate every feeling with his fellows. He cannot do this with Monica, and instead is forced to learn to understand and appreciate her through observation and interaction. As he begins to develop a deeper friendship with her, he is surprised to find that he can often predict what she is thinking or what she will do, despite the lack of an affinity connection. Instead of thinking of her as a member of an inferior or distrusted culture who he must work with for the sake of the mission, he comes to appreciate and respect her as a person.

## Rubra

Rubra is the habitat personality and controller of Valisk. Once, he was a living person who broke away from Edenist society, unable to believe in and accept its precepts and beliefs. These rebel Edenists are sometimes known as 'serpents.' He grew his own independent habitat, Valisk, to house his new company, Magellanic Itg, with which he became very rich and successful. When he died, he transferred his memories and personality into the neural strata of Valisk, becoming the habitat personality. Unlike Edenist habitats, Rubra's personality is the only one present within the habitat personality. Rubra is a strong, controlling personality, who likes to feel that he has the power in every situation. He does not like to be defied, but has great respect for strong individuals who can stick up for themselves. In Dariat, one of his descendents, he finally sees what he thinks is a worthy heir to his company and power, but Dariat's love for a starbridge girl gets in the way. When the girl kills herself Dariat blames Rubra, swearing he will have revenge. In this book, Rubra attempts to manipulate events so that Dariat will be forced to side with him against the possessed.



Rubra is a willful, dominant, proud, manipulative, hard and sometimes ruthless personality. However, he does seem to be genuinely concerned for the living people within his habitat, as he attempts to save them from possession. He sees the possessed as an encroachment on his territory, and as a challenge to his power and authority. He attacks them whenever possible, disrupts them in as many small ways as he can, and spies on them with bitek creatures. Every small success is a huge victory for Rubra, a proof that he is deserving of his dominant position. Saving as many of his people as he can becomes a matter of pride to him, and out-foxing the possessed becomes almost like a game. Eventually, Rubra gets his way and Dariat joins himself with the neural strata. They then defeat the possessed by taking the habitat out of the universe to a place hostile to the possessed. After this point, Rubra will no longer exist as an individual personality, as the habitat personality becomes a fusion of Rubra and Dariat.

## Dariat

Dariat is a descendent of Rubra and the man picked out by him to be the heir to his company and his power. However, Dariat blames Rubra for the death of his beloved Anastasia, a starbridge girl whom Rubra did not approve of. Dariat has sworn revenge on Rubra, but only recently has had the chance to actually carry it out. Now that Dariat is a possessor, he has the power to try to destroy the habitat personality. Unlike most other possessed, Dariat's goals are entirely based on his goals in life. He does not wish to start afresh, to embrace a new life or move the habitat to a universe in which the possessed can dwell safely forever. His one obsession continues to be the pursuit of revenge. The other possessed in the habitat resent and dislike Dariat immensely, a situation that Rubra manipulates to cause Bonney to target Dariat. Rubra then leads Dariat to Tatiana, the sister of his old love Anastasia. Now Dariat is suddenly forced into a situation where he must put revenge aside. He has focused on his hatred and misery for so long that he has not thought of anything else. Influenced by the starbridge religion, he believed Rubra to be the embodiment of Anstid, a personification of hatred, pain and other destructive human emotions and behavior. In other words, for him Rubra symbolized all evil. He saw his mission to destroy Rubra as a quest to destroy evil, hate and anguish. Now he realizes that his feelings were misguided, and is able to admit that Rubra is not Anstid. He even theorizes that a little hate and pain are necessary in order for love and happiness to be truly appreciated. Dariat has come a long way from the hate-filled man he was in earlier books. Dariat now feels that he must protect Tatiana in order to be worthy of the love of Anastasia, and to honor her memory. With these new concerns and feelings rushing in, there is little room left for hate and revenge. Finally, he realizes that the only way to honor Anastasia is to defeat the possessed, and the only way to beat the possessed is to work with Rubra. He helps Tatiana to escape, then joins with Valisk's neural strata.



## Al Capone

Al Capone is one of the main villains of the books, but unlike other characters tends to remain in the background, working through his men and large fleet of ships. Al Capone is the same Al Capone as the famous gangster who ran illegal operations in Chicago in the 1920s. He has returned from the beyond to possess a body on the planet of New California. Now he runs the huge Organization, a government and military force of the possessed intent on defeating the Confederation. Capone represents a different type of threat from possessed on other worlds. He has no interest in removing planets from the universe, wanting political power and dominance instead. Now that he is alive again in the universe, he has no interests in leaving it. Capone tries to use military might as well as appeals to the media to make his Organization seem like an inevitable but sensible and benevolent political leader. His efforts do not work, as the living members of the Confederation do not believe his claims that possessed and non-possessed can live and work peacefully side-by-side under his rule. His use of anti-matter weapons, particularly, has terrified the Confederation into considering him a threat that must be dealt with at all costs. Capone's Organization is a great threat to the Confederation, taking over system after system and planning further attacks. When the Confederation plans to ambush him at Toi-Hoi, Capone gets wind of the plan and sends his own force to attack Tranquillity. At the end of the book, Capone still remains one of the main enemies of mankind.

Capone is an ambitious, forceful individual who rules through any method that will do the trick. He employs fear and respect, harsh punishments for enemies and rewards for his friends, blackmail of the living and promises to the dead in order to keep people in line. Capone shows that personalities who tend to gather power and rise to the top will do so in almost any circumstance or era. However, Capone is also shown as a man outside his time. In this book, he begins to show signs of breaking under the pressure of the strains of his leadership. He is unfamiliar with the technology, politics and fighting of this new age, finding himself often confused and frustrated when things do not go to plan. He longs for the simple one-on-one fighting of his day, even building an old fashioned boxing ring to try to bring back the past. Modern guerrilla tactics seem cowardly and unnatural to him, catching him by surprise. He surrounds himself with other souls of his era, desperately trying to cling on to anything that is familiar. This nostalgia and confusion with modern times is one of Capone's big weaknesses. His other is Jezzibella. Jezzibella appears to be the real power behind Capone, and as the book goes on she seems to make more and more of his decisions for him. It now becomes clear that Capone relies on Jezzibella a little too much, and that without her he would not be able to hold things together. Whether Jezzibella will stick around or turn on him remains to be seen.

## Stephanie Ash

Stephanie Ash is one of the possessing souls living in Mortonridge, on the Kulu planet Ombey. Despite being one of the possessed, she still feels a sense of obligation to the



living children left in the area. Along with a group of other possessed, she begins a mission to gather as many children as possible and transport them to the border. As she carries out this task, she is forced to consider the ethics of possession, as well as the kind of future any of them can hope to have. She has fallen in love with another possessed living in Mortonridge named Moyo, who shares her hopes and fears. Eventually, the group succeed in helping the children to safety. Stephanie, Moyo and their friends present a problem for the reader, as they are not easily fit into a villain or 'good guys' category. As possessors, they are the enemy of all living humans, and have stolen the bodies and lives that they now possess. Their continual presence within these bodies causes constant suffering for the living souls trapped within. When they protest that they have a right to life, and think of their own hopes and dreams, they do not consider the rights, hopes and dreams of the people whose lives they have stolen and destroyed. On the other hand, Stephanie and her friends seem to be compassionate, caring, thoughtful and sensible people. They could easily have left the children to suffer, but have instead gone to the trouble to save them, without any material gain. They are not aggressive or power-hungry as some other possessed are, but instead are content to live peaceful lives, causing no trouble for the living beyond the border. They have no interest in torturing the living to create more possessed. They are also more likeable characters than many of the living, such as Captain Duchamp. Stephanie and her friends represent the fact that morality is never as simple as it may seem, and that humans can rarely be categorized into 'good' and 'evil.' Human behavior, emotions and motivations are much too complex.

## Louise Kavannah

Louise Kavannah is a rich land-owner's daughter from the planet Norfolk. When the planet was take over by the possessed, Louise and her sister Genevieve escaped. They are now trying to reach a planet from which they can catch a ship to Tranquillity, where Louise hopes to find Joshua. Travelling with them is Fletcher Christian, a possessed who aims to track down and stop Quinn Dexter before he can destroy Earth. Louise is a simple, naïve girl who has always been fairly spoilt. In this book, she must learn to become independent and look after herself and her sister. Louise rises to the challenge with bravery and grace, never losing her kindness and compassion but dropping much of her old innocence. She learns to value practical things such as the medial monitor, which will allow her to be less reliant on others. She is extremely curious about the many new things and ideas she encounters, having never had much interaction with the world beyond Norfolk before. Louise's strength and determination are admirable in a girl who suddenly finds herself flung so far from everything she has known and held dear. Louise must remain strong and in control for the sake of her sister and her unborn child.

Louise is pregnant with Joshua's baby, conceived during his visit to Norfolk before the possessed arrived. Louise innocently considered Joshua to be her hero, believing he would return to marry her. Now Louise is quickly learning more about the world she realizes that Joshua is not what she held him up to be, but still refers to him as her fiancé and believes that he will be a good father. Joshua represents her hope for the



future, on which all her hopes are pinned. When Louise finally meets Joshua again, he will certainly have a lot of explaining to do.

## Syrinx (and Oenone)

Syrinx is the captain of the voidhawk Oenone. As all voidhawks and their captains, the two are linked, being distinctly independent entities that are at the same time inseparable. Syrinx is still recovering from her ordeal at the hands of the possessed in the previous books. After undoing therapy, she has been advised to seek out the Kiint and try to find an answer to possession and the beyond. Wing-Tsit Chong, the founder of Edenism, and Athene both agree that Syrinx is a 'tourist.' In other words, she likes to travel and explore new places and ideas only as long as they are safe, but shies away from anything that is actually unexplored. She is apprehensive of her visit to the Kiint, but able to put aside her fears and embrace the unknown. Athene also believes Syrinx to be a 'tourist' of knowledge, claiming that this is why she is exploring religion. According to Athene, Syrinx turns to religion because she is too afraid to form her own ideas and opinions. However, this willingness to look at the ideas of other cultures, which the Edenists have traditionally looked down on, could actually be considered Syrinx's strength. Now that the beyond and the existence of souls are proven true, the Edenists cannot comfortably stick to their old atheist views without considering the possibilities suggested by other ideas. Syrinx, unlike other Edenists, is able to do this. Her more open-minded curiosity and inquisitiveness are exactly what is needed in this situation.

Syrinx, like Joshua, is only at home when travelling through space, exploring new places and experiencing new adventures. She values her freedom, and would never be content to remain in a habitat forever. Her similarities to Joshua help to explain her attraction to him, but it is their differences that have really sparked her interest. Syrinx is fascinated by anything that is different and strange, particularly the Adamist religions that her society considers to be mere superstitious nonsense. She disapproves of Joshua and his reckless behavior. Joshua does what he likes, unanswerable to anyone but himself. Secretly, however, this behavior also fascinates Syrinx, as it is the antithesis to everything Edenism represents.

At the end of the book, Syrinx travels to Tranquillity to bring lone the Confederation's ambush plans. Syrinx is still there when Capone's forces attack and it remains unknown as to whether or not she has survived.

## Erick Thakrar

Erick is a CNIS (Confederation Navy Intelligence Service) officer, assigned to an undercover mission on the Villeneuve's Revenge. Erick's original mission, to investigate Duchamp and try to find out if he knows the location of an antimatter base, is thrown off by the emergence of the possessed. In this book, he manages to help Duchamp get the ship away from Capone's forces, and takes vital intelligence to the Navy concerning



Capone's plans and the location of an antimatter station. Erick is a strong, heroic, motivated character, who successfully fights or eludes the possessed on several occasions. However, Erick is also a character who is slowly falling apart. His mental anguish is paralleled by the physical degeneration of his body. Each time Erick faces the possessed, he encounters new horror and violence. Each time he thinks he will be able to arrest Duchamp, he is forced to compromise his ideals once again. At the beginning of the book, Erick is a very different character from the naïve and idealistic young man of earlier books. He now understands that sacrifices are required when fighting against a threat of this magnitude. This does not mean that he likes such sacrifices, however. Erick is haunted by the memory of Tina, a young teenage girl he killed while proving his loyalty to Duchamp, right at the beginning of his mission. Now, each new horror brings up the memory and the guilt. By the time Erick has fought his way to take his information to Syrinx, he has completely given up. He has experienced so much pain, suffering and evil that he no longer wishes to live, but he is too terrified to die. Instead, he asks for zero-tau, choosing oblivion over life or death. This is the end of Erick's participation in the story for now, but Syrinx insists that she will release him from zero-tau once the problem of the possessed has been solved.

## Jed Hinton

Jed is one of the teenage Deadnight kids living on the asteroid Koblat. Jed's life is a miserable and depressing one, with little affection and no hope for a brighter future. He is searching for a method to reach Valisk because he believes that Kiera offers a different future and a better society. He longs for a place in which everyone will treat each other with love and respect. His belief in Kiera has almost become religious, venerating her like a goddess. He realizes that if he believes in her, then he must change his behavior to be worthy of her. He begins to take down the walls that he has built around himself, and tries to treat his hated half-sister with respect. His obsession with Kiera and belief in the Deadnight cause does not mark him as a traitor or enemy of the living, but simply as a desperate, naïve and misguided young boy.

## Beth

Beth is one of the teenage Deadnight kids living on Koblat, and a friend of Jed. Her life is hard and depressing, devoid of affection and family. Like Jed, she sees the Deadnight society as one in which everyone will be allowed to live their own lives with respect and freedom. Unlike Jed, however, she is not quite so naïve. As the possibility of reaching Valisk becomes real, she pursues her goal with a focused, strong determination. As Jed begins to pull down his mental walls, she begins to build hers up. She gains a new strength and confidence that allows her to take leadership of the group, solving any problems that arise. In Gerald Skibbow she sees a chance to share the affection she longs for, and latches on to him as a parental figure. She takes the role of surrogate daughter and mother to him at once, finding a new sense of empowerment and confidence through caring for him. By the end of the book, Beth has won Gerald's trust enough to be told the truth about Kiera and her possessed. Though she does not want





to accept her own stupidity at first, doubts begin to set in. As their ship changes course and heads to Capone's Organization, the reader hopes that Beth's new found strength and courage will enable her to face the possessed and help Gerald carry out his mission.

## Gerald Skibbow

Gerald is the father of Marie Skibbow, who has been possessed by Kiera Salter. In the previous book, Gerald's own possessor was expelled from his body. Now he has sworn to help his daughter, spurred on by a visit from his dead wife. In this book, Gerald creeps ever closer to his goal. However, Gerald is barely holding it together, still emotionally broken by the suffering he endured while possessed. He is now terrified of all violence, and regularly seems to withdraw into an almost catatonic state of misery and fear. It is clear that Gerald is too weak to carry out his mission on his own, and the reader must hope that Beth is strong enough to help him.

## Bonney

Bonney is one of the possessed living in Valisk. As one of Kiera's aids, she holds a lot of power in the possessed society established in the habitat. Bonney soon becomes obsessed with hunting down and killing Dariat. She hates anyone who defies her, reacting with violence to anything that she perceives as an insult. She is determined to prove herself the superior victor in the battle of wills that is playing out between the possessed and Rubra. She is focused and unrelenting in her obsession, gathering all the possessed around her into a crusade against Dariat and Rubra. Eventually, she becomes so consumed with hate that she loses sight of everything but the need to kill Dariat. As the other possessed turn from her to pursue their own vision of the future, Bonney abandons her own kind. She transforms into a monstrous creature, a physical manifestation of her twisted emotions and hatred. In the end, Rubra is forced to create an unnatural dawn, focusing all the heat energy in the light cells to obliterate Bonney in a devastating heat wave, emphasizing Rubra's god-like powers in dealing with his enemies.

## Ralph Hiltch

Ralph was the ESA head of station on Lalonde. He captured a possessed woman named Annette Ekelund and brought her back to the Kulu Kingdom, where she spread possession on Ombey. Ralph feels a lot of personal guilt and responsibility for this, heightening his determination to defeat the possessed. He is assigned the task of managing the entire liberation operation in Mortonridge, and suggests forming an alliance with the Edenists and with Tranquillity to use bitek serjeants to combat the possessed. Ralph is dutiful, idealistic and determined.



## Athene

Athene is an Edenist, Syrinx's mother, and an ex-voidhawk captain. She struggles with the philosophical problems posed by death and the possessed, wondering how Edenism will cope with the revelations. She claims that there cannot be a god, but does not seem too sure of her own convictions anymore. She asks Syrinx to find the answer.

## Sinon

Sinon is Syrinx's father, now just a memory and a part of the habitat multiplicity. He volunteers for the Mortonridge liberation mission, and his personality is inserted into one of the Tranquillity serjeants. Sinon has more faith than Athene that the Edenists will find an answer to the problems posed by death, the beyond and possession.

## The Lady Macbeth Crew

On the Lady Macbeth, Joshua Calvert is the captain, Melvyn Ducharme is the fusion specialist, Ashly Hanson the pilot, Sarha Mitcham the systems specialist, Dahybi the node specialist, and Beaulieu the cosmonik. Sarha once had a sexual relationship with Joshua but this is now over. Ashly is a wanderer who likes to experience new adventures in new times. When he becomes bored with a particular age he freezes his body in zero-tau to be re-awakened years later. In this book, Melvyn is drowned on the planet Nyvan. The Lady Mac's crew all trust their captain implicitly.

## The Villeneuve's Revenge Crew

On the Villeneuve's Revenge, André Duchamp is the captain, Desmond Lafoe the fusion specialist, Madeleine Collum the node specialist, and Erick Thakrar the systems specialist (also a CNIS undercover agent). Duchamp could be considered one of the villain characters of these books, as he seems willing to do anything or kill anyone in pursuit of material gain. Erick hates Duchamp and longs to see him brought to justice, but the threat of the possessed prevents this. Madeleine and Desmond go along with Duchamp's schemes but disapprove of the man. They have formed a friendship with Erick Thakrar, even saving his life, but do not know that he is an undercover agent. When they do find out, they feel hurt and betrayed.

## Cherri Barnes

Cherri Barnes was a member of the Udat's crew, the blackhawk that Mzu used to escape from Tranquillity. Mzu sabotaged the ship, ensuring the deaths of everyone onboard. In this book, Cherri leads Capone's men to Mzu, then warns Sarha about the danger of the falling ironberg before leaving her body and re-entering the beyond. She finds her conflicting emotions and loyalties difficult to deal with.



## **Endron**

Endron is the systems specialist of the ship Far Realm, which brought Louise, Genevieve and Fletcher off Norfolk. Endron seems to be a sensible, idealistic young man who is sympathetic to the girls' plight. When he finds out that Fletcher is possessed, he is reluctantly persuaded to help them get away from Phobos.

## **Meredith Saldana**

Meredith Saldana is the Rear-Admiral of the Kulu fleet. He is sent to Tranquillity to aid the ambush of Capone's forces, and caught there when the Organization attacks.

## **Peter Adul**

Peter Adul is Alkad Mzu's husband. He has been kept in zero-tau aboard the Beezling for almost thirty years as it headed for its destination. When Mzu finally meets him again, she has aged thirty years while he remains the same.

## **Parker Higgs**

Parker Higgs is one of the scientists working on the Laymil research project on Tranquillity. He resents the Kiint for holding back crucial information about the possessed.

## **Pauline Webb**

Pauline Webb is a CNIS agent who is searching for Mzu.

## **Jay Hilton**

Jay is a child from Lalonde, rescued by Kelly Tirrel and Joshua and brought back to Tranquillity. She now lives on Tranquillity, and enjoys playing on the beach with the Kiint child Hailie.

## **Hailie**

Hailie is a Kiint child living on Tranquillity. She enjoys spending time with Lone and loves the water. She forms a strong friendship with Jay Hilton.



## **Kelly Tirrel**

Kelly is a rover reporter who went to Lalonde to report on the crisis there. She brought back news of the possessed to the Confederation. She is finding it difficult to cope with the horrors that she has witnessed and her fear of the beyond. She now chooses to indulge in virtual reality programs rather than face reality. Like Erick Thakrar, she decides that zero-tau is the best option. When Lieria asks to buy footage of Lalonde, Kelly asks for one million fuseodollars, and is now able to afford zero-tau.

## **Lieria**

Lieria is one of the Kiint living on Tranquillity, working at the Laymil research project. She is the mother of Hailie. She approaches Kelly and asks to buy her recordings of Lalonde. It appears that the Kiint are interested in the Tyrathca Sleeping God, but the Kiint still remain very much a mystery.

## **Kiera Salter/Marie Skibbow**

Kiera is the soul possessing the body of Marie Skibbow. She is in charge of the possessed society in Valisk, and created the Deadnight recording to lure young people to the habitat to be possessed. She is extremely attractive and uses her looks to get her way. When Capone offers to exchange antimatter for hellhawks, she decides to travel to the Organization's headquarters to meet him. We know nothing about how Marie Skibbow is coping with being trapped in her own body.

## **Admiral Samual Aleksandrovich**

Admiral Aleksandrovich is the first Admiral of the Confederation Navy. As he tries to strategize the best method for dealing with the possessed, he must cope with the threat of Capone and the request of the Kulu Kingdom for help with the Mortonridge liberation.

## **Maynard Khanna**

Khanna is the First Admiral's staff officer. At Jacqueline Coutier's trial he is possessed and killed. From his mind, the possessed are able to gain information about the planned ambush of Capone's forces at Toi-Hoi.

## **Dr. Gilmore**

Gilmore is the Navy research scientist experimenting on Jacqueline Coutier and trying to come up with an answer to the possession crisis.



## Jacqueline Coutier

Jacqueline Coutier is a possessor held by the Confederation Navy. She demands a trial, stating that she has rights that should be upheld. At the trial she attacks the courtroom and possesses more people, before realizing that passing on information about the ambush to Capone is more important than her own freedom.

## Liol

Liol is Joshua's brother. He has lived on Ayacucho dreaming of his father's return, and of his ship. When Joshua arrives, Liol is at first heartbroken that his hopes will not come true. He demands that Joshua accept him, and claims rights to the ship. However, as the story progresses, Liol comes to appreciate Joshua's connection to and love of Lady Macbeth, and accepts that no-one but Joshua should be her captain.

## Voi

Voi is Ikela's daughter and a strong supporter of Garissan interests. She helps Mzu in her plans to take revenge against Omuta. She is as cold and determined as Mzu, but also much more naïve.

## Lodi

Lodi is another naïve and idealistic Garissan radical who helps Mzu with her revenge mission. On Nyvan he is killed by the possessed.

## Lawrence

Lawrence is a possessor and a follower of Quinn Dexter. He adores and worships Quinn, believing him to be the prophet of Lucifer. He enjoys the violence and pain that he and Quinn inflict on others. At Jesup, he is killed when he jumps in front of Twelve-T to stop him from killing Quinn.

## Dwyer

Dwyer is one of the possessed, a systems specialist and one of Quinn Dexter's followers. He is murdered by Quinn when their ship reaches Earth's Supra-Brazil asteroid.



## **Genevieve Kavannah**

Genevieve is Louise's little sister. She escaped with her sister from Norfolk, and is now travelling with her to Earth. There they hope to catch a ship to Tranquillity. Genevieve copes with her fear and pain by absorbing herself in computer games.

## **Fletcher Christian**

Fletcher is a real historical individual who initiated the mutiny on the ship *Bounty* in 1789. He has returned from the dead to possess a body on Norfolk. He helped the Kavannah girls to escape the planet, coming face-to-face with the evil Quinn Dexter. Now he has sworn to stop Quinn from causing more suffering on Earth, perhaps as a way to relieve his guilt about his past dishonor. At the end of the book, however, Fletcher is stopped and arrested by Earth's security before he can reach the planet.

## **Kirsten Saldana**

Kirsten Saldana is the ruler of Ombey.

## **Annette Ekelund**

Annette Ekelund is a possessor living on Ombey. She rallies as many possessed as she can to prepare themselves for the liberation attempt that she feels sure will be coming any day. She is one of the more violent, militant possessed and is extremely pessimistic about human nature.

## **Moyo**

Moyo, along with Cochrane, Rana and Tina Sudol, are all possessors living on Ombey who help Stephanie to transport the living children to safety. Moyo has developed a romantic relationship with Stephanie. By the end of the book, they have all formed a deep friendship and agree to stay together.

## **Jezzibella**

Jezzibella is the enigmatic and seductive consort of Al Capone. She is a mood fantasy artist, who can change her looks to suit any fantasy or situation. She appears to be the real power behind Capone, but her motivations as yet are unclear. The readers are never sure if she simply wants power and influence, or if she is manipulating Capone for her own mysterious reasons.



## **Kingsley Pryor**

Kingsley is a non-possessed lieutenant commander of the Confederation Navy, now working for Al Capone. Capone is blackmailing Kingsley into obedience by holding and threatening his family.

## **Oscar Karn**

Oscar Karn is a possessed working for Capone. He is the captain of the Organization frigate Urschel.

## **Alistair II Saldana**

Alastair II is the current king of the Kulu Empire.

## **Prince Noton Saldana**

Prince Noton is the ex-president of the Kulu Corporation. He travels to Tranquillity to request Lone's help with the Mortonridge liberation.

## **Gelai**

Gelai, Ngong and Omain are all Garissan genocide victims who are now possessing bodies on Nyvan to help Mzu. Gelai expresses pacifist views and considers the Alchemist weapon evil.

## **Richard Keaton**

Richard Keaton is a data security expert who helps Joshua to track down Mzu on Nyvan. However, he is later revealed to be not all that he seems, as the possessed's fire cannot hurt him. He claims to have lived for a very long time, and to be not entirely human. When Joshua escapes the planet, Richard stays behind, explaining that his cover has been blown. Exactly who or what Richard is, and what his existence means for humanity, is still a mystery.



# Objects/Places

## Laymil

The Laymil are an extinct alien race that once inhabited the same system as Tranquillity. The remains of their destroyed spaceholms like Edenist habitats form what is known as the Ruin Ring around the gas giant Mirchusko. The Laymil are trisymmetric, with three legs, arms, heads and three sexes: a female type and two male types. The Laymil all committed suicide when facing the same threat of the possessed that humanity is now experiencing. The Laymil seem to have considered their suicide a triumph.

## Tyrathca

The Tyrathca are an alien race that held an outpost on Lalonde. The Tyrathca have now closed off all contact with humanity, fearing the energistic abilities of the possessed. They live in a caste society, with breeders being the only fully sentient members of their species. The Tyrathca on Lalonde worshiped a deity they called the Sleeping God, which they claim to have encountered somewhere in space long ago. They seemed certain that this 'god' would hear their prayers and help them against the possessed. As their species is highly literal and incapable of telling a lie, it seems likely that there is at least some level of truth to their story.

## Kiint

The Kiint are a highly enigmatic and advanced alien race. Their home world, Jobis, displays seemingly impossible technological feats such as a ring of artificial moons, and humans are discouraged from causal visits to the planet. They claim to have no interest in star flight and like to trade in knowledge, though they refuse to give humans any technology that is far beyond what they can already build. Humans know very little about the true capabilities of these aliens. The Kiint are friendly towards humans, but have earned some enmity for refusing to divulge information on how to beat the possessed. The Kiint themselves have faced the knowledge of possession and the beyond, long ago, and survived. There are some Kiint living on Tranquillity, working at the Laymil research project. The characters Hailie and Lieria are both Kiint. The Kiint are huge creatures, around nine meters long, with triangular shaped heads and 'tractamorphic arms' that are capable of morphing into any appendage.

## Habitat

The Edenists dwell in living worlds called 'habitats' that are grown using bitek technology. The habitat contains everything needed for life, including buildings, parklands, oceans and countryside. Everything within the habitat is controlled by the habitat personality, formed from the combined memories and experiences of millions of





dead Edenists. Individuals may 'live on' in the habitat multiplicity for generations before eventually fading into and becoming a part of the general habitat personality. There are also some independent habitats such as Tranquillity and Valisk in which the memories of its citizens do not transfer after death. Valisk is controlled by a personality made up of its founder's memories and experiences only. Tranquillity has its own personality that is mind-linked with its ruler, more like a voidhawk than a traditional Edenist habitat.

## Consensus

Consensus is the mass consciousness and intelligence formed by the affinity-linked minds of every Edenist within a habitat. Each habitat has its own Consensus, and there is also a Consensus that speaks for all Edenism, which is formed at the first ever Edenist habitat or Eden orbiting Jupiter. The Edenist Consensus serves the purpose of a council that discusses and decides on important matters.

## Affinity

Affinity is the mind-link used by Edenists to share thoughts and emotions with each other. Originally it began as an implant in the brain, but has since been encoded into DNA. All Edenists possess affinity capability, as do some non-Edenists such as Lone. Edenists can also use affinity to link with creatures that have been grown with the affinity gene. This allows them to use small creatures such as insects for spying.

## Bitek

Bitek is an Edenist technology based on genetic engineering that allows constructs to be grown for specific tasks. Bitek is used to grow living habitats, voidhawk and blackhawk living ships, soldiers or bodyguards such as the Tranquillity serjeants, and servitor animals such as the house-chimps mentioned in the story.

## Voidhawks

Voidhawks are the living ships of the Edenists, bonded with their captains from birth via an affinity link. The relationship between a voidhawk and its captain is one of deep love, trust and reliance. Voidhawks are more advanced than Adamist ships, and can pull off maneuvers that simple starships cannot. Whereas a voidhawk can enter or exit a wormhole wherever it wishes, Adamist wormholes are limited by orbital mechanics. Blackhawks are an adapted form of voidhawk, created by Rubra at the habitat Valisk. Hellhawks are the possessed blackhawks from Valisk that the possessing souls cause to take on monstrous forms.



## Serjeants

The serjeants are bitek constructs created at Tranquillity to act as police, bodyguards or soldiers. Joshua is accompanied by two serjeants programmed with the personality of lone on his mission to track down Alkad Mzu.

## Starscrapers

The starscrapers are the living quarters found on habitats. They are huge tower blocks that descend below the surface level of the habitat, so that their inhabitants can look out at the stars.

## Neural Nanonics

Neural nanonics are computer systems that are implanted into the human brain and can be controlled by thoughts. Neural nanonics can be used for a vast range of functions, such as monitoring health and vital signs, administering calming chemicals into the blood-stream, interfacing with external hardware or systems, controlling the body's muscles and reactions when engaged in combat, and much more. They can also be used to send instant messages, called datavises, effectively a form of digital telepathy.

## Zero-Tau

Zero-tau is a form of stasis that will freeze a person or thing in the space-time-continuum. In other words, time is prevented from passing in the zero-tau pod. These can be used to neatly contain passengers on long voyages, or to freeze a person for long periods of time, allowing them to 'time-hop' to visit the future. Ashly, the Lady Macbeth's pilot, is a person who has made extensive use of the latter option. Both Erick Thakrar and Kelly Tirrel choose the oblivion offered by zero-tau rather than face death and the beyond. As zero-tau suspends all sensory feeling, it is unbearable for possessing souls to experience. Placing a possessed person into a zero-tau pod will therefore expel the unwanted soul, freeing the living soul trapped within.

## ZTT Drive

The ZTT Drive is the technology that allows faster-than-light travel around the galaxy. The ZTT or zero-temporal-transit drive allows a ship to create a wormhole through which it can travel, 'jumping' large distances almost instantaneously. Voidhawk ZTT drives allow them to create a wormhole ahead of their flight direction, instead of around the ship as Adamist vessels do. This maneuver is not limited by orbital mechanics, and is called a 'swallow.' An Adamist ship's wormhole travel is called a 'jump.'



## The Alchemist

The Alchemist is a super-weapon created by the scientist Alkad Mzu. It works by combining the patterning nodes employed in ZTT drives with zero-tau technology. The 'humane' setting will create a singularity and freeze it in place before it becomes a wormhole. This effectively turns the weapon into a mini black-hole capable of absorbing a star when fired into it. The more destructive setting will freeze it before it becomes a singularity, giving the weapon an incredible density that will compress all matter around it into neutronium. This process releases a huge amount of energy, causing any star that it is fired into to go nova.

At the end of the book, Joshua is forced to fire this weapon into a gas giant, destroying two hostile Organization ships as the gas giant explodes. This is the worst and most dangerous weapon that has ever been invented, and represents a huge threat to mankind. When Mzu escapes Tranquillity with the intent of using the Alchemist against Omuta, Joshua and various different government agents are all sent to stop her. When Capone becomes aware of the weapon, he too begins to pursue Alkad Mzu, and the main characters realize that they must keep the awesome weapon out of the hands of the possessed at all costs.

## Antimatter

Antimatter is a technology that can be used to power starships or create massively destructive weapons. Ships or combat wasps fuelled by antimatter are capable of accelerating at a much faster rate than those running on other fuels. Antimatter warheads are far more destructive than other weapons, releasing temperatures that can pierce any defenses and lethal radiation that will kill voidhawks and blackhawks. The use of antimatter is illegal. In fact, the establishment and enforcement of this law was the main reason for the creation of the Confederation alliance of planets. Part of the huge threat posed by Capone is his use of antimatter weapons. Erick Thakrar, a CNIS undercover agent, was assigned to the Villeneuve's Revenge in the hopes of tracking down an illegal antimatter station. The combat wasp designed to carry the Alchemist is powered by antimatter. At the end of the book, Joshua uses antimatter to push his ship to intense levels of acceleration in order to escape the exploding gas giant.

## Combat Wasps

Combat wasps are advanced missiles that can contain a variety of different submunitions and are powered by a variety of different fuels. These are the standard weapons used by starships.



## SD Network

The SD (strategic defense) networks are the planetary defenses that protect most inhabited worlds from assault. The SD networks will monitor incoming vessels, check their flight authorization, and attack anything perceived as a threat. They usually employ combat wasps as weapons.

## ESA

The ESA is the External Security Agency of the Kulu Kingdom, responsible for gathering intelligence and ensuring the safety of the kingdom and its assets. It is not concerned with internal affairs or planetary security, which falls under the net of the ISA or Internal Security Agency. However, the ESA operative Ralph Hiltch is put in charge of the Mortonridge liberation mission due to his previous experience with the possessed. Monica Foulkes, tasked with tracking down Alkad Mzu, is also an ESA agent. The Kulu Kingdom is ruled by the Saldanas and comprises nine different star systems.

## CNIS

The CNIS is the Confederation Navy Information Service. They conduct covert operations throughout the galaxy on behalf of the Confederation Navy. CNIS operatives are often tasked with gathering information about the existence and location of illegal antimatter stations. Erick Thakrar and Pauline Webb are both CNIS agents.

## Arcologies

The arcologies are the domed cities of Earth, protected by reinforced walls from the heat of the planet and the destructive armada storms that ravage the world, both brought about by the negative effects of human expansion and industrialization.

## The O'Neill Halo

The O'Neill Halo is a ring of asteroids around the planet Earth. These asteroids were deliberately maneuvered into their orbit by a careful process involving changing their trajectories. The asteroids were then mined and colonized.

## Nyvan

Nyvan was the first inhabitable planet discovered by humans. It was colonized by people from every race, minority, culture and religion, resulting in a multicultural planet that has dissolved into constant warfare between its various factions. Learning a lesson from Nyvan's mistake, planets are now colonized only by members of a particular ethnic group or ideology, avoiding the conflict that has ruined Nyvan. When Quinn Dexter



realizes that he will not be able to get near Earth without the proper codes, he goes to Nyvan to acquire a more appropriate ship. Nyvan is also visited by Alkad Mzu in her attempts to obtain a ship and supplies to carry out her revenge mission. Joshua, Monica and Samuel follow her to Nyvan, where there is a massive showdown between these characters and Capone's possessed.

## Jesup

Jesup is one of Nyvan's asteroids and Quinn's temporary base of operations. Before Quinn leaves for Earth, he detonates the bombs he has placed on Jesup and blows the asteroid up. The asteroid fragments then rain down on the planet, causing destruction wherever they hit. They also throw up filth into the atmosphere that blocks out the sun, effectively creating an eternal night on Nyvan. This is Quinn's offering to the deity he worships: God's Brother, otherwise known as the Devil.

## Ombey

Ombey is a Kulu planet that is infiltrated by the possessed. The entire peninsula of Mortonridge is quickly lost to the possessed, but the military establish a border around this area. The Saldanas decide that they must launch a mission to liberate Mortonridge from the possessed, an operation that Ralph Hiltch is put in charge of. Mortonridge contains the town of Exnall, where Stephanie and Moyo possess their new bodies. Stephanie and Moyo round up as many living children as they can around Mortonridge before transporting them to the military border where they will be taken to safety.

## Norfolk

Norfolk is a pastoral world colonized by English-ethnic people who wished to live in a society with limited technology and archaic values. It is the home world of Louise and Genevieve Kavannah, who are forced to flee when the possessed take over. It is the first planet after Lalonde to be removed from the universe by the possessed. Norfolk is famous for the alcoholic drink known as Norfolk Tears that is produced from roses grown on the planet.

## Omuta

Omuta is the planet that dropped 'planet-buster' bombs on Garissa during a war with them. This resulted in the genocide of the Garissan people, and the forced evacuation of the few surviving Garissans. The Confederation Magistrature Council then punished Omuta by executing their cabinet and high command, and placing a weapons embargo on the planet. As this book opens, the embargo has only just been lifted, leaving Omuta vulnerable, without Navy protection for the first time in thirty years. Mzu plans to take advantage of this weakness to wreak her revenge for the Garissan genocide. Omuta's sun is the intended target of her Alchemist weapon.



## Garissa

Garissa is Mzu's home world, a planet that was destroyed by the Omutans. Now Garissa is too radioactive to support life, and the few surviving Garissans have been forced into exile on other worlds, quickly losing what remains of their culture.

## Valisk

Valisk is the habitat created by Rubra to house his new company, Magellanic Itg, after he turned his back on Edenist culture. After he died, Rubra's memories and experiences were transferred into Valisk's neural strata, and he became the habitat personality. Valisk is a society built on freedom that welcomes people from any walk of life. It particularly attracts dissidents and non-conformists who cannot find a place in their own culture, such as the starbridge tribes. It is also a base for blackhawks, the adapted voidhawks created by Rubra. Some see it only as a base for criminals and wasters. When Valisk is taken by the possessed, Rubra is determined not to give up without a fight, making the habitat a very dangerous and inhospitable place for the possessed. Eventually, he is able to defeat them by taking the habitat out of the universe to a place hostile to the possessed.

## Tranquillity

Tranquillity is an independent habitat ruled by Ione Saldana. Tranquillity was grown by Michael Saldana as a base from which to study the Ruin Ring left by the Laymil spaceholm destruction. This act served to have him thrown out of the Saldana family and excommunicated from the church, as the Christian Kulu Kingdom considers bitek and affinity technology to be a sin against God. Ione is a descendent of Michael Saldana, and as such is considered an outcast from the Saldana family. She has shared an affinity bond with Tranquillity since birth, forming a relationship of deep love, trust and affection. Tranquillity is the base of Joshua Calvert and was the home of Alkad Mzu before she escaped. As a completely independent nation, it is universally considered the safest place to keep Mzu. Tranquillity becomes an important place in this story, as its serjeants are requested to help liberate Mortonridge, and it is chosen as the base from which to launch an ambush of Capone. Unfortunately, Capone gets wind of this plan and launches his own attack against Tranquillity. At the end of the book, Tranquillity has completely disappeared and its fate remains a mystery.

## The Beyond

The beyond is the dimension or place in which the souls of the dead become trapped, suffering eternal torment. The beyond is packed with souls who all try to rip memories and experiences from each other for the temporary illusion of sensory feeling that this bestows. Souls in the beyond appear to be aware of what is happening in the universe of the living, and have now found a way to break through to possess new bodies. Dr.

Gilmore observes that if the souls can experience the passing of time, then the beyond is subject to change. This means that the souls in it can be killed.



# Themes

## Conflict

Conflict is the main theme of this book. All characters and all areas of the Confederation experience some form of conflict in the story. The biggest conflict described is between the possessed and the living, who fight over the right of dead souls to possess the bodies of the living. For the living, this is theft, torture and cruelty and cannot be tolerated. The possessed fight for their right to live again, desperate not to be forced to go back into the torment of the beyond. Neither side can compromise because there does not seem to be a middle ground. Some possessed, however, are more violent and militaristic than others. On planets such as Norfolk, the possessing souls avoid conflict by removing their new world from this universe. Others, such as Stephanie, Moyo and their friends, simply wish to be left alone. Other souls, such as Capone, Kiera and Annette Ekelund, are much more willing to fight to retain their gains of this universe, not wanting to lose everything they have worked for if they move. These souls crave power and will stop at nothing to get it.

Capone is the biggest threat to the Confederation, as he has formed a large government and military of possessed called the Organization. He is fully willing to fight the living with weapons and illegal antimatter as well as with possession and energetic abilities. This is conflict on a scale that the Confederation has not experienced before, as Capone is able to possess a planet once he has taken it, effectively creating a huge hostage situation. Any retaliation against Capone will result in the deaths of the innocent people that have been possessed. By possessing the places he captures, Capone is also able to ensure loyalty much more easily, though even his Organization is not without internal conflict. Kiera does not represent the same threat as Capone, as her tactics do not include overt conflict, but a more subtle seduction. She lies and fools Deadnight kids into thinking they will be coming to a better society, luring them to her to be possessed. However, now that Kiera has been persuaded to join forces with Capone, the two can put their assets together to form an even greater threat. Kiera's hellhawks will add a new element to Capone's strategy, giving him an enormous advantage against the Confederation. When the Confederation sees a chance to ambush Capone's forces they jump at the chance to defeat such a dangerous enemy, despite the fact that attacking Capone's fleet will result in the loss of many innocent lives.

The living also decide that they must strike back against the possessed in another place. The Saldanas, the rulers of the Kulu Kingdom, decide to initiate a mission to liberate Mortonridge of the possessed. This is where Annette Ekelund has taken over, and where she is massing her own forces for the coming fight. Various characters express their concerns and distaste for this conflict throughout the book. Admiral Aleksandrovich and Lone both consider it to be a misguided mission that will not achieve effective enough results to justify the massive loss of life it will incur. However, both also see that the decision is more political than practical. The liberation will help to restore





hope to people, and will also form ties of friendship between normally distrustful governments. The war will also buy them time to come up with a real solution. The Edenist Consensus thinks along much the same lines. Annette Ekelund is very scathing of the whole affair, pointing out that human nature is essentially weak, violent and cruel. She points out that the mission will end up destroying the lives of so many that it is attempting to save. In reply, Ralph points out that the campaign is worth it because they owe it to the living trapped within their own bodies to at least attempt to save them. He does not take the same view of human nature as Ekelund, pointing out that Stephanie Ash was benevolent and compassionate enough to save the children, despite being a possessor. He believes that the liberation mission will do enough good to justify the consequences of the conflict. Whether the liberation war is right or wrong, misguided or the Saldanas' duty, is ultimately left up to the reader to decide.

The main storyline of this book involves a mission to find and stop Alkad Mzu from using her doomsday weapon in an act of revenge against Omuta. Omuta was responsible for destroying her own home world, Garissa, so Mzu will now destroy theirs by obliterating their sun. Revenge is shown as a pursuit that will only lead to a never-ending cycle of violence, hatred and suffering. Mzu's weapon also threatens the galaxy in general should it ever fall into the wrong hands. The author raises the question of whether weapons of mass destruction should ever be created and if there are any situations that can justify their use. In the pursuit of Mzu, the main characters who are trying to stop her often come into conflict with each other and with the possessed. The reasons for their conflict are the suspicions and distrust thrown up by the various governments they support. If only they could all work together, they would find their mission a lot easier to carry out.

The story also explores the various causes of conflict and how it can be avoided. Both Annette Ekelund and Quinn Dexter believe violence and conflict to be a fundamental aspect of human nature, an unavoidable part of who we are. Ekelund expresses disgust, but resignation that this should be so. Quinn Dexter, by contrast, embraces pain and violence and believes that mankind should indulge its more destructive impulses. Ralph questions this pessimistic belief, and certainly the author gives the reader enough examples of characters who act altruistically despite their circumstances, from Stephanie's rescue of the children and Fletcher's resolve to save Earth, to Cherri Barnes' warning to Sarha and the Edenists' respect for life. However, despite their ability to show compassion and restraint, all the characters mentioned above are not above engaging in conflict if they feel that they have to. Do the motivations and circumstances dictate the morality of conflict, or is conflict always to be avoided? Perhaps Quinn and Ekelund are correct, and conflict is an unavoidable part of human nature.

In a story that involves so much conflict, it is important to look at the reasons that cause it. The author gives us four simple reasons. The first is the fight for life, which is either one's own or the people that are held dear. This is the conflict that most of the main characters find themselves flung into at various points, as their lives or the lives of their friends become threatened. This is also the reason that most of the possessed are fighting, as they do not want to give up their new lives. This too, is the reason Ralph gives for the conflict with the possessed. He is fighting for the lives of the living souls



trapped within their bodies, who cannot put up their own fight. The second reason is the pursuit of power and dominance, which spurs on characters such as Capone, Kiera, Quinn Dexter and, in a sense, the Saldanas who do not like to see their authority threatened on one of their own worlds. The third reason is revenge, which spurs Alkad Mzu and Dariat. When a person is wronged, they cannot help but want to lash back. To retaliate, however, simply inflames the cycle of violence and conflict.

The fourth reason for conflict lies in human differences. People choose to incite violence between themselves and others because of beliefs and values that they cannot compromise on. This is given as one of the biggest and most problematic causes of conflict. The prime example of this trouble is the planet Nyvan, which was colonized by people of every different minority, race, culture and religion. Though they worked together at first, the planet soon descended into constant warfare between the different factions. Various characters discuss the fate of Nyvan, concluding that people with different ideas just cannot get along. A deeper look at this cause of conflict in motion can be seen at Ayacucho, where the radical Garissan youth have adopted a stronger need for revenge against Omuta than their own parents who actually lived through the genocide. The Garissan youth feel the need to belong to something, as they do not have a strong enough sense of identity. They find this sense of belonging and identity by separating themselves from others, making their own group closer and stronger. This separation, however, quickly leads to conflict. This situation is paralleled by the Deadnight kids, who group together in order to feel like they belong. For them, being a Deadnight gives them a sense of identity that is separate from the herd. No-one wants to feel like they are simply one more face in a crowd, so they create differences that separate them from others. Again, the Deadnight's cause leads to conflict with those who do not believe in Kiera's message.

If human differences cause conflict, then perhaps the way to avoid conflict is to avoid mixing people with different beliefs. This is the solution that most worlds have adopted, only allowing those of a particular ethnic-origin to colonize the planet or asteroid. This keeps people of similar groups together, avoiding the conflicts that arise from opposing values and beliefs. This appears to be partially successful, as the other planets seem less prone to conflict and violence than Nyvan. However, the emergence of the Deadnight kids, the radical Garissan youth, and the emigration of misfits to places such as Valisk shows that people will still always look for differences where they can. In a way, differences, and the feeling of identity and individuality that they bring, are as much a part of human nature as anything else. This is the view expressed by Endron, who explains how the youth of Mars rebel against conformity by buying clothes from off-world that mark them out as different and individual. In the communist society of Mars, this is a potentially destructive situation. Endron's solution is to avoid conflict by not fearing change. If the Martian youth wish to abandon communism then they should not be prevented from doing so, and no person should be segregated for having differing views. However, this sounds like an idealistic solution that would not be very practical in reality. Accepting change and not forcing one's ideology onto others sounds very sensible, but there must always be some things that people will not be able to compromise on. Possession is one such thing. For all his talk, Endron would not accept change if it meant giving in to the possessed.



The Edenist approach to avoiding conflict is the most successful, but perhaps also the least palatable to modern readers. The Edenists live in a society where every person shares their feelings, ideas and experiences with everybody else from birth. The Edenists are never separated from their community. This means that Edenists tend to be very balanced, happy people, as any problems are turned over and resolved by the entire community, and any damaging emotions calmed. Edenists all display the same ideas and beliefs as each other and they all tend to react in much the same ways to each circumstance. Conflict is almost unheard of in Edenist society because there are not enough differences among them to ever lead to it. There is also very little crime, as harming another Edenist would only be to harm oneself. This sounds like an ideal society: peaceful, balanced and incorrupt. However, the fact that Edenists all think and react alike seems to suggest a deep brainwashing from birth, as each Edenist is never free of the mass beliefs and consensus of the greater consciousness that is Edenism. Edenists certainly seem to retain a sense of individuality, but they are nowhere near as free and self-determining as Adamists such as Joshua. In such a society, could an Edenist ever be sure that his or her thoughts were entirely their own? By wiping away differences, have Edenists also wiped away individual thought and identity? When Syrinx expresses beliefs that seem to go against traditional Edenist ideas, Athene is quite scathing, calling her a 'tourist' who is too afraid to come up with her own ideas. However, it seems that Athene is really the one who is afraid, as she simply spouts the Edenist view that there is no God. Syrinx, by contrast, is willing to consider the possibility that what she has always been taught to believe might be wrong. Rather than being a weakness, this is her strength. Edenism, for all its talk of being the perfect society, seems just as anxious to establish its own differences from the Adamists, feeling itself to be superior in every respect.

In exploring conflict, the author has looked at the different types of violence that can emerge between humans and the reasons that cause it. The most problematic cause of conflict seems to be human differences, which are not a simple matter to avoid. In fact, it seems to be an ironic fact that the need to belong often forces people to separate themselves from the crowd, forming small elite groups or minorities. Even societies built on the concept of avoiding differences begin to see separation eventually. Edenism might be the best answer, but it seems to have negated conflict by limiting human individuality. If our differences are part of what makes us human, then perhaps conflict is indeed an inevitable part of our nature, just as Quinn and Ekelund suggest. Rather than run or hide from our differences, perhaps, like Syrinx, we should try not to fear them but accept and tolerate them for the beautiful variety that they provide. With tolerance, trust and respect comes friendship and success, as several characters learn by the end of the book, including Monica and Samuel, Joshua and Liol, and the Edenist and Kulu governments. If we are brave enough to explore different ideas rather than dismiss them, and to show respect to those we disagree with, perhaps we can at last learn to work together in peace.



## Alliance

If conflict is the main theme of the book, then alliance is its counter-theme. Alliances are shown as the cure for, as well as the result of, conflict. Difficult situations cannot be entered into without help, and powerful individuals can only remain in control if they have a strong support network on which to stand. Al Capone is a threat because he has built a huge Organization, persuading the possessed to work together for a common goal. His alliance with Kiera also helps him to solve problems he could not tackle alone, as her hellhawks are the answer to his problems with the voidhawks. Capone's relationship with Jezzibella also shows what two minds working together can achieve. All over the galaxy, the possessed are coming to the same conclusions, that they cannot hold on to their new lives without working together. Annette Ekelund draws a large force around her, and Stephanie forms a group of friends to help her transport the children to safety. On other planets and asteroids, possessors from different periods, cultures and religions are able to put aside their differences to form unified fronts against the living. On Norfolk, they combine their strength and willpower to move the planet from the universe. Nothing the possessed do can be achieved alone, and the very reason they are such a big threat is their willingness to work together and help each other out.

In order to deal with the possessed, the living are being forced to form alliances too. For the first time ever, the Kulu Kingdom is extending the hand of trust and friendship to old rivals. They not only ask the Edenists for help, they also approach Lone Saldana, a figure they have vastly disapproved of. In turn, the Edenists and Lone accept the offer of friendship and agree to give their support. Even if they may consider the liberation mission to be misguided or immoral, they cannot pass up the chance to forge bonds of trust and understanding. Admiral Aleksandrovich is astonished at this turn of events, and reflects that it is a bitter irony that it took conflict of this magnitude to force the opposing governments into an alliance.

Alliances are also formed between the characters searching for Mzu. At first, Samuel and Monica are able to put aside their differences to achieve a common goal. Again, it has taken a terrible threat to prompt such an alliance. However, now that the alliance has been formed, Samuel and Monica find that a deep friendship is forming between them as they begin to understand and respect each other, and to accept the other for who they are rather than the faction they represent. If Samuel and Monica's relationship is a smaller-scale parallel of the cooperation between Edenism and the Kulu Kingdom, it suggests a positive outlook for the new alliance. Samuel and Monica are not the only ones forming an alliance to catch Mzu. On Nyvan, they are also forced to work with Joshua to ensure their mission's success, as well as their own survival. Mzu, too, is driven to accept the help of her old enemies in order to keep her weapon from the possessed. It seems that in the face of a common enemy, the unlikeliest alliances can form.



## Death

Death is an important theme in this book as it is one of the main discussion topics of various characters throughout the story. Naturally, now that the existence of souls and the beyond has become apparent, people are very interested in death and what comes after. Death has been shown not to be the final end to a person, as many had previously believed that it was. Instead, souls become trapped in the beyond, suffering eternal torment. Their only release is through ripping the memories and experiences from other souls for the temporary illusion of sensory experience that this brings. This is not a very appealing picture of life after death, and has surprised and depressed living people all across the galaxy. Now, people are having to come to terms with how they feel about these revelations.

The most obviously affected are the major religions, such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and others. These religions are based around the idea of a God or gods who love their creation, and of salvation after death for people who have lived moral lives. Unsurprisingly, people are now questioning why a good God would allow the existence of the beyond, and permit the eternal suffering of people's souls. On the other hand, the existence of souls has now been proved without a doubt. This is something that major religions have been preaching about for years. The existence of some form of experience after death also seems to lie a little in their favor, as the beyond seems like a very strange place to exist without any good reason. Interestingly, some people look at the beyond as evidence for an underlying order to the universe, while others see only pain and chaos. Actually experiencing the torment of the beyond also does not seem to leave souls with a firm conclusion one way or the other. For some, it serves to destroy their belief in religion and God. For others, it confirms it. Some see the beyond as a form of purgatory and assume it is a stage that they must suffer through before being permitted to heaven. Others see their new life in their stolen bodies as the salvation that they have been promised.

The beyond also poses problems for Edenism. Edenist culture is built around the sharing of experience and emotion, and the transfer of memories into the habitat personality after death. When Edenists die, they know that they will 'live on' in the habitat personality. Athene calls this their 'reward' for living a good life, and describes it as a little like becoming a beloved grandparent of their whole race. In a sense, the atheist Edenists have created their own form of afterlife and heaven. As a result, Edenists do not tend to exhibit the same neuroses and fears about death as many Adamists do. With the revelation that souls exist and suffer in the beyond, Edenism's firm beliefs and superiority have been severely shaken. Now they must worry whether their souls 'live on' in the multiplicity, or whether they go somewhere else, leaving only memory behind. Is memory the same as a soul? The Kiint seem to believe not, as they claim that an Edenist memory simulacrum is not the same as the person. If this is true, then Edenists are suddenly forced back into a position of uncertainty as to what will happen to them after death. Edenist souls do not seem to become trapped in the beyond as Adamist souls do. Does this suggest that there is another place they can move on to? Why did Laton and the Kiint suggest that Edenist souls are better prepared



for what faces them and more capable of moving on along 'the great journey'? Some Edenists such as Syrinx are also now beginning to question their long-held atheist beliefs. In a universe in which souls exist and carry on experiencing after death, perhaps there is some truth to the old religions after all.

When faced with the knowledge of the beyond, some characters give up in despair, while others are encouraged to fight for what is important in life. Both Erick Thakrar and Kelly Tirrel do not cope well with the extreme suffering they have seen, but it is the thought of either suffering for eternity or becoming one of the enemy that forces them to the extreme option of choosing zero-tau. Both choose oblivion over life or death. Zero-tau offers what death no longer seems to: complete lack of experience or feeling. In zero-tau, they cannot suffer or turn against their old friends. Other characters, like Joshua and Syrinx, have come face-to-face with the possessed and managed to keep their sanity intact. They are both now completely determined to find the answers to death and the beyond, and hope that they can find a solution that will benefit everyone, both living and dead. Joshua also begins to realize that his carefree life might be missing something important, and his thoughts turn to the women he has dated as he wonders how his casual treatment of them has affected them. Syrinx is able to take her experience and learn from it, pushing herself to question everything she has been taught to believe.

When the possessed consider death, they remember the beyond with horror and are determined to never be sent back into it. Even compassionate and altruistic possessors such as Stephanie Ash and Fletcher Christian cannot bring themselves to abandon their stolen bodies. The possessed will only retreat into the beyond when given no other choice, such as Dwyer and Cherri Barnes right before they are killed. However, the willingness of Gerald Skibbow's wife to flit into life and back out again, as well as the soul who is following Quinn, suggests that some souls do not fear the beyond as much as others. Perhaps these souls are comforted by the knowledge that there is a way to escape the beyond if they are brave enough, or can let go of their old existence completely. However, eternal life can be just as frightening as eternal death, a feeling that Stephanie expresses to her friends in Mortonridge. It also seems unlikely that possessed society is sustainable.

When considering why some souls move on and others become trapped in the beyond, the reader is forced to consider moral, philosophical, religious and other reasons. Members of all different faiths seem to become trapped while Edenists move on, suggesting that no particular God is keeping his non-believers out of heaven. It is true that Edenists are generally more balanced, agreeable and law-abiding people, but if souls are kept in the beyond for moral reasons, this again suggests the existence of a god. Who or what else could regulate such a decision? Laton seemed sure that Edenists are better prepared to face death than Adamists. Could this simply be because Edenists do not fear death in the same way? Perhaps it is negative emotions and desires such as fear, hate, greed and resentment that keep souls trapped in the beyond.

By introducing this theme, the author is asking the reader to think about one of the oldest and biggest questions that faces mankind. Do souls exist and if so what happens



to them after death? This is the question that religions have sprung up to answer, and the question that many people are looking for when they question their faith. Science also tackles this problem when it looks for ways to increase people's lives and cures for fatal illnesses. Human instinct involves the desire to remain alive as long as possible. Yet humans must also resolve themselves with the fact that they will certainly die. Peter F. Hamilton uses this story to look at how various people might attempt to do this, and the consequences if they cannot. People are not meant to live forever, as Stephanie Ash points out, and they will destroy themselves if they try.

## Religion

Religion is a theme that often goes hand in hand with the theme of death in this story. As people discuss what the beyond and the existence of souls means for them, they naturally turn to or away from religion. The proof that souls exist, but the reality of the terror that is the beyond, also pose an interesting dilemma for traditional religions. It is important to note which characters are religious and which are not in this story. The possessed seem to represent all different beliefs, from atheism to devil-worship. It is significant that some possessed consider their suffering to be proof that there is no god, while others see their new life as a form of salvation. This demonstrates just how open to interpretation all religions really are. The two main questions that religions must now ask themselves are: why would God allow suffering in the beyond and the possessed to exist? And is there something beyond the beyond?

Joshua is a character who finds a new spirituality and belief in God while fighting the possessed. Despite the horror that he knows is waiting in the beyond, he cannot help but feel that the universe is ordered. Syrinx, too, begins to question religious belief, pushing aside her Edenist prejudices against the old Adamist religions. While talking to Athene, she reveals her interest in religion and Athene accuses her of looking for easy answers because she is afraid. However, Syrinx's ability to question long-held beliefs seems more of a strength than a weakness.

There are a whole range of different religions mentioned in the book, including the main Adamist religions, Quinn's Light Brother sect or devil-worship, Dariat's belief in the starbridge cult, and the Tyrathca Sleeping God. Some of these religions are extremely hostile to each other, and the author mentions how humans were forced to avoid conflict by colonizing worlds with like minded people. This is how the Kulu Kingdom, a huge Christian empire of worlds, has emerged. This Kingdom has traditionally been distrustful of Edenists and bitek technology, even casting out the Crown Prince Michael Saldana for growing a habitat. Quinn's Light Brother sect is antagonistic towards all other religions, especially Christianity. By introducing the theme of religion, the author is asking the reader to consider why people believe different things, and why religions often cause conflict. He also explores how religion tries to provide the answers to life's bigger philosophical problems.



## Revenge

Several characters in the story are driven by the need for revenge. Alkad Mzu and the radical Garissan youths who help her are determined to have revenge on Omuta for the genocide of their people. These characters are blinded to the fact that this revenge will only lead to more pain and suffering, and that revenge can only trigger a never-ending cycle of violence. They do not stop to ask themselves if the Omutans will also seek revenge for the atrocity that they are now planning to unleash on them. Mzu is also blind to the fact that it is not the authorities or the ones who initiate conflict who will suffer in any retaliation attempt, but the innocent civilians. Even the appearance of Gelai does not demonstrate this fact to her. Gelai was one of the people killed in the genocide of Garissa, but she was simply a student protesting peace. Actual members of the Garissan Navy, Ikela and Mzu herself were not killed. This is clear evidence of the fact that innocent people suffer while leaders escape. If Mzu fires the Alchemist into Omuta's sun, the whole population of Omuta will be forced to flee their world. Anyone in a high enough position to have born some responsibility for the attack on Garissa is most likely already dead, as their cabinet and High Command were executed for their crime. If there is anyone left worth taking revenge on, then they will probably not suffer as much as the ordinary people will from Mzu's attack. A good example of this is Ikela, who was a captain in the Garissan Navy, escaped the genocide, and grew rich off a company built on the money gained when he sold the antimatter from his ship.

As if this were not enough to deter Mzu from her revenge, Gelai even points out that she would not wish revenge on Omuta, and cannot believe that Mzu's plans are right. If a victim of Omuta's attack can express these views, then perhaps Mzu should listen. However, Mzu's anger, hatred and arrogance get in her way. She is so determined to carry out her plans for revenge that she fails to see the threat that the possessed really pose. She thinks she can remain in control of her weapon, but the possessed soon close in on her. Finally, she realizes what a mistake she has made, and what a disaster it would be if the possessed obtained her weapon. Revenge blinds her until it is almost too late.

In other circumstances, Mzu seems like a fairly practical and reasonable woman. She clearly loves her husband very much, and is willing to die to save the galaxy from suffering if the possessed should get hold of her weapon. This shows just how much revenge can twist and change a person. Mzu has lived with nothing but hate and thoughts of vengeance for thirty years, turning her into a cold, hard, ruthless person.

Dariat is also a character driven by revenge. For his whole life he too has thought of nothing but his hatred and need for vengeance. Like Mzu, part of his suffering comes from his separation from the person he loves. Like Mzu, he chooses to seek revenge against who he sees as the cause of this separation. In Mzu's case that was Omuta. In Dariat's it is Rubra. Rubra represents all that is wrong with the world for Dariat. He is a manifestation of all evil, hate and pain. Dariat believes that by destroying Rubra he will be able to end his own hate and suffering. His need for revenge blinds him to the threat the possessed represent, as he sides with them for the power they offer him to carry out





his plans. He is also completely blind to the obvious fact that the peaceful Anastasia who he loved so much would never wish for him to behave in this way. Like Gelai, she is the victim in whose name revenge is being sought, and like Gelai, she would certainly disapprove of it.

When Dariat meets Tatiana, however, he is suddenly forced to think differently. Like Mzu, when a new priority presents itself, thoughts of revenge fall into the background. Revenge can only be sustained as an all-consuming passion. Once it has been put aside, the hate and pain that fuel it will quickly diminish. Dariat's new priority is to protect the sister of the woman he loved. If he does not do so he knows he will not be worthy of Anastasia's love. Through protecting Tatiana, Dariat is finally forced to acknowledge the true threat that the possessed pose. Suddenly, he is able to let go of all his hate for Rubra in the interests of a greater good. He realizes that Rubra is not a manifestation of all hate and pain, and that Dariat cannot rid himself of these emotions simply by killing Rubra. The only way Dariat can release himself from all his destructive emotions is to let go, and if not forgive, to at least forget.

Other characters who are driven by revenge are Quinn Dexter, and to a certain extent Erick Thakrar. Quinn seeks revenge against Banneth, the woman who betrayed him to the authorities and had him arrested. She is the reason he was taken to Lalonde. Quinn can never let an insult lie, and will respond to all opposition or mockery with violence. Quinn's insecurities prompt him to try to re-establish his power and dominance whenever he perceives himself to be challenged. Quinn is therefore driven by revenge because every insult must be met with a violent retaliation. In a sense, Quinn's whole religion is one of vengeance, as the deity he worships is the Christian devil, antagonistic towards the Christian God who flung him from heaven. Quinn particularly enjoys hurting Christian priests, carrying out the revenge of his God.

Erick Thakrar is obsessed with the need for revenge for the death of Tina. Erick blames himself for her death, but takes this blame and channels it into anger towards Duchamp, who ordered him to fire on the ship she was in. However, Erick is able to control his hatred and desire to see Duchamp suffer, as he understands that greater things are at stake. He still cannot let go of the destructive emotions that boil beneath the surface, however, and is left bitter and twisted that he cannot have Duchamp arrested. Erick can never let go of his guilt, pain and anger, because he can never see Duchamp brought to justice. In the end, the guilt and hate, combined with his fear of the possessed and the suffering he has endured, cause him to break down and give up on life.

The characters who pursue revenge in this story are all blinded or ruined by it in some way. Revenge is shown as a desire that will only feed pain and anger. As long as a person seeks revenge, they can never be free of the destructive emotions that tear them apart. Letting go of revenge is the first step to being able to heal old pains and move on with one's life. Revenge is also shown as a purpose that merely perpetuates a never-ending cycle of violence and suffering.



## Utopia, or the Perfect Society

There are many points in the novel where the aim to create a perfect society is described. The first planet humans colonized was Nyvan, where a fairer society was envisioned by combining many different faiths, cultures, races and ideologies. However, this only led to conflict between the various factions of the planet. Learning their lesson from this mistake, humans chose to separate into isolated ideologies instead, colonizing worlds with only like-minded people. This, however, does not necessarily create the perfect society, as people try to establish a separate identity from the crowd by separating into smaller groups again, finding new differences to argue over. Endron's solution to this is to allow change to happen, and never fight to impose an ideology on someone else. However, this raises the question of what happens when two beliefs simply cannot tolerate each other. It also assumes that all change is good. Endron, for all his talk, would not stand by and let change happen if it meant the possessed taking over his home.

Edenism at first appears to offer an answer to the problem of the perfect society. They have created a culture that is free from crime and conflict, and in which its people are all healthy, balanced and happy. However, this appears to come at the expense of a sense of individual identity. The Edenists are allowed to think for themselves, but when they are constantly connected to everyone else, how can they ever do so? Edenists display individual traits and characteristics, yet they all seem to think and react the same. Edenism's form of a perfect society does not seem to be achievable without a certain amount of brainwashing. Edenism has also shown itself to be utterly wrong about the existence of souls and the afterlife, despite their supposed ability to think through any problem better and faster than the Adamists. Edenists have always remained superior and secure in their values and beliefs, but now the possessed are forcing them to question everything they have held to be true. However, Laton and the Kiint seem to believe that the Edenists have the best chance of 'moving on' after death. Whether or not Edenism is a perfect society or not, it seems like it might be the best one to be a part of during this crisis.

A different form of society is offered by the independent habitats, Tranquillity and Valisk. Tranquillity has attracted business and enterprise due to its tax breaks. This has resulted in a rich, successful society that is considered a glamorous place to live. Before the possessed took over, Valisk used to offer a place for all dissidents and non-conformists to live unhindered. Valisk was also a place that attracted business and enterprise. However, these societies do not necessarily present equal chances and opportunities to their less rich members. Rather than an entirely fair or just society, these places represent freedom. Here, people can be who they want to be and believe what they want to believe. Though they cannot claim to have eradicated conflict, as Edenist habitats do, they offer the freedom and individuality that Edenism cannot. It is hard to imagine characters like Joshua living anywhere else.

Perhaps the possessed can create the perfect society where the living have failed. They appear not to fight among themselves over differences such as race and religion, and



will happily join forces to combat the living. They are also capable of removing their worlds from the universe, taking them to a place where each person can have all that they desire. However, in practice, possessed society does not seem to be sustainable. The possessed are reluctant to work to produce food or keep infrastructure intact. They cannot ever have children of their own, and even if they do have their hosts' babies, they will not want to allow their children to become possessed. The idea of eternal life also scares them almost as much as death, leading to a whole new set of neuroses. It is also not guaranteed that the possessed will continue to work together in harmony. Ekelund already shows signs of extreme dislike for Stephanie, and Nyvan's example shows that once hardships are over, people will naturally begin to fight over their differences.

Kiera offers her own form of the perfect society, luring Deadnight kids to Valisk by talking about freedom, love and respect. She will embrace everyone's right to be different, but will also help each person to be included, as they will belong to one big, loving community. This sounds like it will combine the better aspects of Edenism with the freedom of the independent habitats. Unfortunately, it is a complete lie. Kiera understands the appeal of the perfect society, demonstrating what a powerful concept it can be. The irony is that her society will actually only offer pain and possession, a loss of freedom and no love or compassion. The Deadnight cause is a false dream that does not and never will exist.

With this theme, the author asks his reader to question their own society, to think about what makes it good and what could be improved. He wonders what the perfect society would look like and whether it could ever practically be achieved. The readers are also forced to ask: is there such a thing as the 'perfect' society at all?

# Style

## Point of View

The point of view of this novel is the third person. Therefore, all accounts of events and characters' emotions are reliable. As the narrative skips back and forth between a large cast of characters, it is necessary to have one objective and omniscient narrator who can speak with authority about what is happening throughout the whole galaxy. This omniscient view also allows the reader to have knowledge that the characters may not, building dramatic irony or suspense. For example, as the Confederation prepares for its ambush of Capone, the reader knows that Capone is aware of their plans and plotting his own strike against them.

Events are usually told through the eyes of particular characters, though rare descriptive or explanatory passages do occur, usually to provide exposition for a particular planet, society, or technology. Readers are allowed deep into the thoughts and motivations that make the characters tick, allowing them to compare different people's reactions to death, possession and the beyond. When exploring themes such as conflict, alliance, revenge and religion, it is vital for the reader to be able to see how different characters are affected by others' actions. By allowing the reader to see some events through the eyes of the villain characters and the possessed, such as Capone, Mzu, Ekelund, Stephanie and Kiera, the author can show that people are rarely as one-sided or 'evil' as they might at first appear. The reader is allowed to see the many different emotions and motivations that will cause people to act as they do. The author also forces the reader into the eyes of characters they will not like and cannot relate to, such as the sadistic Quinn Dexter. All scenes involving Quinn are usually shown through his eyes rather than through the frightened perspective of his followers and victims. This helps to keep Quinn from seeming like an over-the-top pantomime villain, as the reader is aware of the thoughts, impulses and insecurities that motivate his actions. It also serves to emphasize Quinn's cruelty and sadistic nature, as the reader can be left in no doubt of how much Quinn really enjoys inflicting pain and suffering.

The story is told mainly through dialogue and action sequences, keeping the pace moving quickly and the narrative exciting. With so many different characters and simultaneous plotlines, the book could quickly become bogged down and boring if not handled in this way.

## Setting

There are many different locations in the story, as the narrative switches back-and-forth between all the different characters. Many of the characters are also on journeys, introducing yet more locations as they travel about the galaxy. The story is set in our galaxy, the Milky Way. Humankind has spread to occupy hundreds of planets and asteroids in the many different solar systems. People can travel between the different



systems by opening wormholes and 'jumping' to a new location. This allows huge distances to be covered almost instantaneously, solving the problem of faster-than-light travel. The different occupied worlds vary greatly from each other, from pastoral worlds that ban advanced technology to highly industrialized planets. There are also habitats grown using bitek technology that are basically living worlds. All Edenists live in these habitats, but there are also some independent habitats such as Tranquillity and Valisk. A habitat is a huge cylinder that contains buildings, parklands, oceans and countryside, and simulates gravity with centrifugal force. The habitats are controlled by the habitat personality, which in Edenist worlds are made up of the millions of experiences and memories of the Edenists who die there.

Before the possessed began to take over, the galaxy was roughly peaceful. A loose alliance called the Confederation was formed to establish and enforce a ban on antimatter technology, which was being used in horrific weapons at the time. The Confederation Navy acts as a police force and protector for the galaxy. Its headquarters are found on the planet Trafalgar, which is where all scenes with Admiral Aleksandrovich and Dr. Gilmore take place. Humanity is split into two main 'types,' the Adamists, more 'traditional' humans, and the Edenists, whose minds are all connected with each other and with their habitats from birth. Adamists tend to live on planets or asteroids, with the exception of some independent habitats. Planets are usually colonized by members of one ethnic-origin, culture or religious group, in order to try to avoid conflict. The Adamists tend to believe in some form of god or gods, though there are some atheists too. The Kulu Kingdom, one of the most powerful governments in the galaxy, is a Christian empire founded by the Saldana dynasty who rule over it. The Kulu Kingdom does not allow the devout members of other faiths to immigrate to their worlds. By contrast, all Edenists are atheists. As Edenists are transferred into their habitat multiplicity after death, they do not exhibit the same neuroses and fears concerning death as many Adamists do. However, the existence of souls, and of the beyond and the possessed, is forcing many Adamists and Edenists to question their long-held beliefs.

Joshua, Monica and Samuel's journey to track down and stop Alkad Mzu takes them first to Ayacucho, then to Nyvan. Ayacucho is one of the Dorados asteroids, which were offered as a home to the survivors of the Garissan genocide. The Garissans, of an African-ethnic origin, find themselves having to mix with other cultures and races, and as a result their culture and values are being lost or absorbed. This has caused many of the more radical Garissan youth to try to re-establish their sense of identity by blaming and hating the Omutans, who destroyed their world. Ayacucho has many successful businesses and enterprises run by the Garissans and funded by the reparation money given to them for the atrocity which was done to their people. Mzu, Joshua, and Monica and Samuel leave Ayacucho when the possessed begin to take over. They travel to Nyvan, the first planet to be colonized by humans. At the time, a mix of different cultures, religions and ideologies had been allowed to immigrate, leading to a planet in constant conflict between the different factions. Quinn Dexter also visits Nyvan, forming a base on one of its asteroids, Jesup. As Joshua, Mzu, Samuel and Monica leave, Quinn blows up the asteroid, causing the large fragments to rain down on the planet below, resulting in destruction and suffering. The asteroid fragments throw up filth into



Nyvan's atmosphere, blocking out the sun. From now on, Nyvan will experience eternal night.

One of the most important locations in the novel is Tranquillity, an independent habitat grown by Michael Saldana, who was cast out of the family and excommunicated from the church for using bitek technology. Tranquillity was created primarily as a base from which to research the Laymil, an alien race whose remains form the Ruin Ring around the gas giant Mirchusko. Since then, Tranquillity has become a base for many businesses and enterprises, enjoying the freedoms and low tax offered by its constitution. Tranquillity is now a very successful hub of business and the home of many wealthy entrepreneurs. It is considered a glamorous and exciting place to live. Tranquillity's rulers are the descendents of Michael Saldana, born with an affinity link to the habitat personality. The current ruler is Lone Saldana. Tranquillity is Joshua's home, as well as the location of the Kiint Hailie and Lieria, and the refugee girl from Lalonde, Jay Hilton. Tranquillity is chosen as the safest place to keep Mzu, as well as the base for a planned ambush of Capone. Unfortunately, Capone hears of this plan and attacks Tranquillity himself. At the end of the book, Tranquillity has mysteriously disappeared.

The other independent habitat featured in the story is Valisk, grown by the ex-Edenist Rubra as a base for his new company, Magellanic Itg. When Rubra died, he transferred his memories and experiences into Valisk's neural strata, becoming the habitat personality. Valisk became a refuge for all dissidents and non-conformists emigrating from other planets and cultures. Rubra decided to welcome these people because he had also turned his back on his own culture, Edenism. Many people view Valisk as a base for criminals, and a place that attracts the wasters and 'no-goods' of other societies. Valisk is also the base of the blackhawks, which are an adapted form of voidhawk created by Rubra. When the possessed take over Valisk, Rubra fights back in any way he can, turning the living habitat against them. Finally, he defeats them by removing the habitat from the universe, hoping to take it to a place hostile to the possessed.

Another important location in the novel is the planet Ombey, one of the Kulu worlds, ruled over by Kirsten Saldana. This is a pleasant, tropical world that finds itself infiltrated by the possessed. The possessed are confined to the Mortonridge peninsula with a military barrier preventing anyone from leaving. The Kulu Kingdom then begins to plan a liberation mission involving the aid of the Edenists and the use of Tranquillity serjeants to defeat the possessed. Exnall is a town in Mortonridge where Stephanie and Moyo enter their new bodies. They travel around Mortonridge collecting living children and take them to the military border and so to safety.

Other locations include Mars' moon Phobos, where Louise, Genevieve and Fletcher stop off on their way to Earth, the Supra-Brazil asteroid that Quinn arrives at to travel on the tower-lift down to Earth, the pastoral planet Norfolk which is removed from the universe by the possessed, and Koblat, the depressing asteroid that the Deadnight kids are so anxious to leave. The Kiint home world, Jobis, is also visited by Syrinx on her quest to find out more about the possessed and the beyond. It has a ring of artificial moons, suggesting that the Kiint are an incredibly technologically advanced race.



Strangely though, for the race's home world, it does not seem to exhibit any signs of the development of an advanced race. Capone's base of operations, New California's asteroid Monterey, is the location of any scenes involving Al Capone.

## Language and Meaning

The language of this novel can at points be very technical, including some complicated scientific concepts. Long descriptions of particular planets or forms of technology can sometimes be difficult to read or hard to understand. These technical words and descriptions help the author to establish a sense of authority and realism behind the science fiction. Rather than simply stating that the Alchemist is a powerful weapon that can destroy a star, a detailed explanation of exactly how the weapon achieves this feat is given. This helps to add depth to the novel, making the world, characters and technology seem more vital and real. The story may be complete fantasy, but the author wishes to ground it in reality, giving the reader a sense of a future that is actually possible. Although some readers may find these sections a little challenging, the author never patronizes the reader or slows down the pace too much with these explanations. In fact, if readers wish to skim these sections to move on to the action, no great understanding or appreciation of the story will be lost. They simply add an extra element for readers who like to try to understand how things work.

Other than these occasional explanatory passages, the novel tends to avoid long descriptions. In a story with so many characters and side-stories, too much description would only weigh it down, slow the pace, and bore the reader. The novel is essentially an action story, with conflict, adventure, and excitement on every page. Slower sections where characters philosophize on the nature of death, religion, or other major themes are inserted between faster paced and more urgent scenes. The reader therefore feels that there is always something happening, some new threat to be combated or mystery to be explored, or another important event lurking around the next corner.

The language used in each character's dialogue helps to establish their personality traits and origins. Joshua's speech is loose, friendly and easy, like himself. Samuel and the other Edenists tend to be a little more formal, but also more blunt, as they are not used to keeping feelings or observations to themselves. They also tend to speak in a much calmer manner than Adamists, even when faced with problems or dilemmas. Syrinx is the exception, as she has started to pick up some of the habits displayed by Adamists like Joshua. She uses the expletive 'Jesus,' indicating her curiosity about Adamist behaviour and religion and her willingness to accept other cultures' ideas. This little habit also reveals how much of an impression Joshua has made on Syrinx, and how she cannot help thinking about him despite her disapproval of him. Other characters indicate their background or current position through their speech. Admiral Aleksandrovich speaks formally, as is appropriate for a man of his position, whereas Quinn Dexter is more likely to rant and rave and use swear words, indicating his angry, vindictive impulses and his background as one of the disadvantaged youth of Earth's arcologies. The possessed often talk in old fashioned or stilted ways, revealing which period of Earth's history they may have lived in. Capone and his men all talk like



American gangsters from the 20s, reminding the reader that this is indeed where they have come from. Others, such as Fletcher, seem almost comical in their use of archaic language, indicating that they have come from much further in the past. Ashly, too, sometimes uses archaic language or phrases, indicating his sojourns in various time periods. When Richard Keaton talks in old-fashioned sounding sentences or uses strange words, this is the reader's first clue that he is much older than he seems.

## Structure

The novel has fourteen chapters that are split into small sections that follow a different character or characters. The narrative hops back-and-forth constantly between its huge cast of characters, rarely lingering for more than a few pages with any particular person. The exceptions are chapter 10, which focuses entirely on events within the habitat Valisk, and Chapter 11, which focuses on Nyvan. These chapters both describe climactic events that the reader would not appreciate being taken away from or interrupted in the middle of. Even these two chapters still jump about between different characters within the same storyline. This structure is necessary when dealing with so many characters and parallel storylines, as the reader needs to know what is happening everywhere at each point. This structure also allows the author to highlight particular themes, such as conflict, revenge, death and religion, by showing how various different characters react and feel about the same situation. It also helps to show how one character's actions may have devastating or unexpected consequences for another.

There is one main storyline for this novel, many sub-plots, and even more smaller parallel stories. Keeping track of them all can be a little confusing, but the author does a good job of interconnecting them where appropriate, and of heightening the suspense by switching back-and-forth. The main storyline revolves around Mzu's quest for revenge and the various people trying to stop her. This storyline involves many of the main characters, who sometimes have small side-plots within the framework of this larger story. For example, Joshua is tracking Mzu down for lone, but he also meets a brother he never knew he had and gradually learns to accept him. As the story reaches its climax, many other characters get sucked in to the events on Nyvan. By the end of the book, Mzu, Joshua, Samuel, and Monica's storylines have all merged into one. Sub-plots include events on the planet Ombey and the Kulu leaders' attempts to face this threat, Erick Thakrar's efforts to take important information to the Confederation, the Confederation's planned ambush of Capone, Quinn Dexter's personal mission to bring suffering to the galaxy, Louise, Fletcher and Genevieve's journey to Earth, and events in the habitat Valisk as Rubra tries to persuade Dariat to side with him to defeat the possessed. Examples of smaller stories within these subplots are the mysterious existence of the 'watcher characters,' the efforts of Dr. Gilmore at Trafalgar and Parker Higgens at Tranquillity to come up with a solution to possession and the beyond, and Jacqueline Coutier's trial. By the end of the book, only one storyline is resolved. The Alchemist has been retrieved and destroyed and Mzu is safely in the hands of the authorities once more. All other sub-plots and mysteries will be resolved in the last two books.



The pace of the novel is very fast and exciting, with something new happening on every page. The constant switching back-and-forth between characters helps to generate a sense of urgency and suspense. Long descriptions are avoided, with the exception of some technical explanations, with action scenes and dialogue the prevalent method of storytelling. Ponderous or philosophical passages are always inserted between more exciting scenes, so the frenzied pace of the novel is never lost.



## Quotes

"After the frontier had been tamed and the pioneering spirit flickered into extinction the ancient rivalries lumbered to the fore again" (Chapter 2, pg. 40.)

"The chant of a billion tormented entities is not one to be ignored" (Chapter 3, pg. 69.)

"When will people learn that if we kill the possessed bodies all we're doing is simply adding to the numbers of souls in the beyond; and I doubt the families of those we kill will thank us" (Chapter 3, pg. 73.)

"We are presented with an opportunity to engender a more peaceful and tolerant universe when the present crisis is terminated" (Chapter 3, pg. 81.)

"And to err is human. We embrace our humanity, complete with all those flaws" (Chapter 3, pg. 81.)

"That eager face which permitted so much inner anger to show without ever dimming the natural innocence. Child of the failed revolutionaries" (Chapter 4, pg. 103.)

"It's quite something to look right down into the abyss and see what's there waiting for you, one way or the other, as possessed or possessor" (Chapter 4, pg. 143.)

"At one level he was pleased, prejudice can be abandoned if the incentive is great enough. What a pity it had to be this, though" (Chapter 6, pg. 213.)

"You cannot impose ideologies on people who do not embrace it wholeheartedly" (Chapter 7, pg. 241.)

"'I don't want to live for the rest of time,' Stephanie said. 'I really don't. That's almost as frightening as being trapped in the beyond. We're not made to live forever, we can't handle it'" (Chapter 7, pg. 262.)

"I can never accept that revenge wrought on such a scale is right" (Chapter 8, pg. 278.)

"After all those years of struggle you've finally beaten Anstid. He hasn't dictated what you're doing now. This act is not motivated by hatred and revenge" (Chapter 10, pg. 359.)

"They're going to torture us, hurt you so bad you'll beg a soul to possess you and stop them" (Chapter 12, pg. 465.)

"He cried out in wonder and misery as he struggled his way into the victim's agonized nervous system. There was pain, and shame, and humiliation to cope with; tragic, terrible pleas from the body's true soul" (Chapter 12, pg. 473.)



"You lost the right to self-determination when you built the Alchemist. If you give yourself enough power to make a galaxy fear you and what you can achieve, you abrogate that right to those whom your actions affect" (Chapter 12, pg. 474 .)

"It's not just Adamist religions the beyond undermines, it's ruined the whole concept of transference. What's the point? You are your soul, if you are anything" (Chapter 12, pg. 487.)

"The Kiint found a way to face the beyond and survive. It's here somewhere" (Chapter 12, pg. 488.)

"I have faith in our sick nature to hate and envy, to be greedy and selfish, to lie. You forget, for six centuries I couldn't hide from the naked emotions which drive all of us" (Chapter 13, pg. 514.)

"At its highest setting the Alchemist would become such a cosmological entity; its surface concealed by an event horizon into which everything can fall and nothing return" (Chapter 14, pg. 568.)

"This time it would be different. They could establish their nirvana here. And it would last forever" (Chapter 2, pg. 39.)



## Topics for Discussion

Discuss conflict in this story. What are the main battles being fought and how did they begin? Who, if anyone, is at fault? What methods can be used to prevent conflict? Is conflict an inescapable part of human nature?

Can the creation of weapons of mass destruction such as antimatter weapons and the Alchemist ever be justified? If so, in what circumstances can they be used?

Who is the main villain of this story and why? In your answer you may wish to consider what it means to be a villain. Do any of the villains ever act like heroes, or vice versa? Do circumstances ever justify their actions? Who has caused the most damage or suffering for the Confederation, and who represents the biggest threat? Characters you may wish to consider include Quinn Dexter, Al Capone, Alkad Mzu, Captain Duchamp, Jezzibella, and Kiera.

Who is the hero of this story and why? Is there just one hero, or are there many? Perhaps no-one really qualifies for this role. In your answer you may wish to consider the characters' motivations, strengths and weaknesses. Who, if anyone, saves the day? Who is the most successful, or carries out the bravest or most significant actions? Characters you may wish to consider include Joshua Calvert, Erick Thakrar, Monica and Samuel, Ralph Hiltch, Stephanie Ash, Fletcher, and Louise Kavannah.

Discuss religion. How are the various religions mentioned in the book affected by the possessed? Can any provide adequate answers as to how or why the dead return? Why would a good god allow suffering in the beyond? How do the possessed themselves view or use religion? In your answer you may wish to consider Quinn Dexter's devil-worship, Edenist atheism, the main Adamist religions, Dariat's beliefs, Joshua's new-found spirituality, Syrinx's explorations, and the discovery of the Tyrathca Sleeping God.

Is Edenism the perfect society? In your answer, you may wish to consider the Edenist approach to violence, religion and tolerance. How have the Edenists wiped out conflict from their society? Why are all Edenists pleasant, balanced people? Is any Edenist truly a free individual? Is Edenist society weak in any way? Would you like to be an Edenist?

Discuss revenge. Which characters are driven by revenge and how does it blind them? What causes them to seek vengeance? Can revenge ever be justified? In what ways does revenge perpetuate cycles of destruction and pain? Whose lives have been ruined by their own or other characters' need for revenge?

Should the possessed be entitled to the same human rights as the living? In your answer you may want to explore what the concept of 'human rights' actually means, and whether the dead are technically even 'human.' Do the souls in the beyond have as much right to life and sensory experience as the living? Can anyone really claim to own



their own body? Should Jacqueline Coutier have been given her trial? Are there any possessed who seem more deserving than some of the living characters in this book?

"So much of Confederation life was centered around the casual use of electronics" (Chapter 14, pg. 552.) Discuss this quote. Is Louise's observation correct? Are humans too reliant on technology? How do various people react in situations where their neural nanonics no longer work? How do the possessed use their ability to glitch electronics to their advantage? In your answer you may wish to consider how many times Joshua and other main characters rely on electronics. Have they become dependent on them?

Discuss love and relationships in the book. How are various characters' relationships affected by the threat of the possessed? Do the possessed display the ability to love? How is the love shared between voidhawks and their captains, and lone and Tranquillity, different from other forms of love? How do various characters' approach sex? Does anyone use seduction as a weapon? Who is the right woman for Joshua and will he ever settle down?

What is the purpose of the alien species found or discussed in the novel? What do they add to the story, themes, mysteries and character developments? How are they different from humans? Can humanity learn anything from them? In your answer you should discuss the Kiint, the Tyrathca and the destroyed Laymil civilisation. You may also want to consider the mysterious 'watcher' characters and the various bitek creatures found in the story, such as the serjeants, house-chimps, habitats, and voidhawks.

Are the various female characters found in the book empowering to women, or not? In your answer you should consider which women hold positions of importance and why. Which women exert control through seduction? Are women often reliant on men? Why do all women succumb to Joshua's charm? Is Louise a strong character? Are there any female 'hero' characters? Important female characters to consider in your answer are Syrinx, Louise, lone, Jezzibella, Kiera, Sarha, Monica Foulkes, Pauline Webb, Bonney, Stephanie Ash, and Annette Ekelund.