

The Neutronium Alchemist Consolidation Study Guide

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

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



Contents

The Neutronium Alchemist Consolidation Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1-2.....	5
Chapter 3-4.....	9
Chapters 5-6.....	12
Chapters 7-8.....	15
Chapters 9-10.....	18
Chapters 11-12.....	21
Chapters 13-14.....	23
Chapters 15-16.....	26
Characters.....	29
Objects/Places.....	38
Themes.....	42
Style.....	44
Quotes.....	47
Topics for Discussion.....	50



Plot Summary

Captain Joshua Calvert and the Lady Mac have just rescued Kelly Tirrel, Father Horst, and children of Aberdale children from Lalonde. The epicenter of the possession outbreak is now under complete control by the returning dead, and is enshrouded in the red cloud they use to hide themselves. Joshua returns to Tranquility, where Lone Saldana asks him to track down the escaped Dr. Alkad Mzu, who escaped from her long captivity on the Blackhawk Udat and is expect to attempt to recover the dreaded weapon, the Alchemist, and use it on the Omurtan homeworld. Louise Kavanaugh, her sister Genevieve and possessor Fletcher Christian escape from Norfolk and pursue the evil Quinn Dexter to the Sol system. Throughout the Confederation, new leaders like Kiera Salter, Annette Ekelund and the 20th century gangster Al Capone take charge of the forces of the possessed, infecting and consuming planet after planet.

Joshua Calvert, whose starship the Lady Mac is the only ship to return from the mercenary fleet's assault on Lalonde, is asked by his lover Lone Saldana, the Lord of Ruin and ruler of the bitek habitat Tranquility, to track down and capture or eliminate rogue scientist Dr. Alkad Mzu. It has been thirty years since the Omurtans wiped out Mzu's homeworld, but Lone and the Confederation believe that Mzu will recover the Alchemist, a devastating weapon of unknown abilities that she invented during the war, to exact revenge upon the Omurtan home world.

Mzu, having escaped from Tranquility on the Blackhawk Udat, sabotages her rescuers and boards another starship for the Dorados asteroid cluster, where she meets with a group of Garissan loyalists. The elder loyalists, remnants of Mzu's original mission to use the Alchemist on Omurta, fail to support her and are caught by Confederation and Edenist agents. Mzu slips away, aided by a group of younger loyalists led by a young Garissan named Voi.

On Valisk, the Rubra control personality, the artificial intelligence that controls the habitat, is unable to stop the forces of the possessed, lead by Kiera Saltera, from converting most of the habitat's population. Rubra begins a campaign of sabotage of his own systems, while at the same time attempting to sway Dariat, a descendant of the real Rubra, and a man affinity-linked to the Rubra personality, to change sides and help defend the habitat. However, Dariat blames Rubra for the death of his first love, Anastasia, and has sacrificed himself in order to return as one of the possessed and help Kiera eradicate the Rubra A.I. Kiera Saltera, in an attempt to draw more people to Valisk for possession, makes a series of propaganda recordings that paint the habitat as a paradise free of the doldrums of Confederation life. The recordings, which becoming known as the Deadknight fleks, entice many Confederation citizens, especially the young, to break the quarantine and smuggle themselves to Valisk. Once there they are tortured and possessed.

Louise Kavanaugh has escaped from her home world of Norfolk, accompanied by her young sister Genevieve and the valiant possessor Fletcher Christian. After a brush with Quinn Dexter on the way off the planet, Fletcher Christian becomes obsessed with the



Satanist leader and tells Louise that Dexter, who is more evil than the possessed, must be stopped. Dexter has escaped from Norfolk as well, hijacking a navy battleship and flying it to Earth, only to be rebuffed and force to flee by Sol system security.

20th Century gangster Al Capone possesses the body of a New California man and, with the help of the growing population of possessed on the planet, takes over the government, forming an Organization that quickly takes control of the surrounding space. He allies himself with the ruthless and knowledge diva Jezzibella and, having seized a source of powerful and valuable anti-matter, they build a fleet and begin flexing their might against the Edenists and the Confederation.



Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary

Joshua Calvert and the crew of the Lady Mac have just rescued Kelly Tirrel, Father Horst, and a large group of children from the doomed planet of Lalonde, which has now fallen to the possessed. On Norfolk, Louise Kavanaugh, who is pregnant with Joshua's baby, is impatient for news of her father, who has taken the local militia to the capital city of Norwich to quell riots seemingly brought on by communist revolutionaries.

Unbeknownst to the Kavanaugh women, Norwich has fallen to the possessed led by Quinn Dexter, and Louise's father has been possessed. On Ombrey, Ralph Hiltch and his team have been trying to help the planet security network to lock down the spread of the possession virus by three former members of the Lalonde embassy, whom Ralph inadvertently transported to Ombrey along with his possessed captive, Gerald Skibbow. Dr. Alkad Mzu, having escaped in breathtaking fashion from her long captivity on the bitek habitat Tranquility, is at large, and everyone, including the Lord of Ruin, lone, the ruler of Tranquility and another lover of Joshua Calvert, is terrified that Mzu will recover her long hidden weapon, the Alchemist, and use it to annihilate the planet of her people's sworn enemy, Omurta.

Chapter 1

Louise and Genevieve Kavanaugh are anxiously awaiting their father's return from Boston. He has taken the local militia to help suppress the unrest incited by the labor unions and the communist party. Louise is pregnant with Joshua Calvert's child, but has not revealed this shaming fact to anyone. All of her hopes rest upon Joshua's return and the promise of wedlock with the starship captain.

Grant Kavanaugh arrives on the train from Boston, accompanied by a group of strangers, including Quinn Dexter. Marjorie and her daughters are dismayed at Grant's appearance and behavior and know that something is terribly wrong with him. He tells them that the strange men that accompany him will be staying at the estate. As soon as they enter, the lights in the house begin to flicker and malfunction. It does not take long for things to go awry. Hearing what sounds like their mother pleading from behind their parent's closed bedroom door, the girls go to investigate. When the door bursts open, they see that their father has transformed into a large, armored beast and is accosting the maid. Their mother screams at them to flee as their father kills the maid and their nurse. The girls race to the stable and ride down their father, who is attempting to hold the door. They see that his wounds heal rapidly and that the murdered maid and nurse are now in pursuit of them as well. They ride toward the gate, which is blocked by one of the men, but as they approach the man is shot and falls clear of the gate. The girls ride into the night, while upstairs, Quinn Dexter, who is looking down upon the scene, tells Marjorie that whoever has helped them escape will pay.



Louise and Genevieve ride into Colsterworth, the nearest town, but find several of the buildings in flames and the sequestration of the population already begun. On the edge of the town they meet the Romany woman Carmitha. The three women are then accosted by a sequestered man, but another man appears and defends them. Their assailant flees and their savior introduces himself as Titreano. He tells them that he too is a possessor. He is shocked to learn from the girls that he is not on Earth, but another world whose place names are borrowed from Old Earth English geography, and that the year is 2611. He tells them that he has been dead for 800 years. Together the four set off for the sea, hoping to find a berth off of the continent.

On Ombrey, Ralph Hiltch learns that three of the embassy staff that he brought with him from Lalonde are believed to be sequestered and have already disappeared on the planet. Ralph reassembles his team from Lalonde and together they head for a meeting with Xingu security. En route, they learn that a civilian plane out of Pasto is experiencing electrical problems on its way to the planet's capital, Aetherstone. They arrive at the meeting with Xingu security and are told that the plane is seven minutes from landing. Hiltch tells them that the plane must not be allowed to land and must return to Xingu. The pilot refuses to turn the plane around, telling control that he will not risk retracing his course when he is experiencing electrical difficulties. Hiltch agrees to a compromise that will allow the plane to land at a nearby military field, where it will be quarantined. A passenger hijacks the plane, telling the pilot that it must land in Aetherstone. Through the pilot's nanonic broadcast, Hiltch recognizes the man as Savion Kerwin, one of the sequestered embassy staffers. The pilot turns the plane back toward Aetherstone, but Hiltch has the military shoot the planet down from orbit.

Chapter 2

The infamous gangster Al Capone finds himself in possession of the body of Brad Lovegood on the the planet of New California.

On Ombrey, security forces tell Ralph Hiltch that they have devised a method for tracking the sequestered, based on the fact that they have a detrimental effect on surrounding electronics. The security force has linked a powerful set of computers together to track all electronic glitches occurring on the Xingu net. Hiltch tells them that the transmission method of the energy virus is unknown, but that simple proximity or even physical contact does not imply contamination. Gerald Skibbow has emerged from zero-tau free of the virus and is undergoing examination. Hiltch proposes having zero-tau chambers ready to cure captured targets.

The computer system has identified three vehicles that left the spaceport just after the arrival of the embassy three and that have experienced electric problems. Hiltch leads an assault on a warehouse housing one of these vehicles, a taxi, but discovers only the thief who stole the taxi. They raid another warehouse, targeting the second vehicle and find the building full of possessed. They kill 23 and capture 6. The third original target vehicle is a bus filled with sixty people. When the security forces track it down, white fire shoots out of the bus, bringing down one of the tracking aircraft. Hiltch has the bus



vaporized from space, only to learn that it has already stopped at four towns on the peninsula of Montbridge.

Quinn Dexter leaves Cricklade with Lawrence Dillon. He tells his young disciple that Norfolk is a dead-end, and that they must find passage to Earth.

In San Angeles, popular performance diva Jezzibella is preparing for a concert. She has two young teenagers pulled out of the crowd thronging the gate, and she rages at her support staff while she prepares for the show.

Chapters 1-2 Analysis

Norfolk is an example of a society constructed on the principles of agrarian idealism, but its social structure and morality has more in common with the post-industrial England of the Victorian age. Louise is terrified that her pregnancy will be exposed before Joshua can return to Norfolk. The tension created by this fear is short-lived however and is soon replaced by a fear for the life of her child and for her young sister Genevieve. Titreano's confusion about his location is understandable. All of the geographical names on the planet Norfolk have been borrowed from 18th century England. Hamilton has compromised on Titreano's speech and manner. Language evolves rapidly and someone speaking true 18th century English would be difficult for English speakers of today to understand, let alone those of the 27th century. The author uses a few token words of King James English—such as thee, thou and whilst—along with a small amount of verbal anastrophe to place this character in his time. Titreano is not the first possessed to aid the living. In the previous volume, Kelly Tirrel encounters a possessed named Shaun Wallace, who helps her team avoid the possessed on Lalonde and rescue Father Horst and the children of Aberdale.

Hamilton employs the cumbersome term "sequestered" in the first two volumes to describe what the reader now knows is possession by the dead. Hamilton uses the longer, vaguer term to keep the reader temporarily ignorant of the nature of the invasion. He quickly drops the use of "sequestered" in this the third volume, as the reader and most of the characters in the story now understand the specifics of the sequestration.

Hamilton opens chapter two with a lengthy biography of Al Capone. He withholds the identity of his subject until the very end, allowing the reader possibly to derive some satisfaction by anticipating the identity of the new possessor. This particular method of carrot dangling is quite common in science fiction, where famous figures from history are frequently incorporated into story-lines.

The ease with which the possessed can spread among the populace of a planet makes Ralph Hiltch's task on Ombrey similar to that of Sisyphus, a mythological Greek king, who is punished for his avarice and treachery by being forced in the afterlife to repeatedly roll a large boulder to the top of a hill. The boulder immediately rolls down the other side and Sisyphus is compelled to repeat the task again and again.



Quinn Dexter uses his powers of coercion to force Lawrence Dillon to satisfy his homosexual desires. The supposed connection between Satanism or immorality in general and homosexuality is a common belief and is used frequently enough in literature to be classified as a lamentable cliché.



Chapter 3-4

Chapter 3-4 Summary

Al Capone takes to the streets of San Angeles, having learned that his new magical abilities allow him to shape matter, including his clothing, into whatever form he wants. He gets into an altercation with a couple, who are helping him call a taxi, and the fighting quickly turns into a street brawl, with Capone killing several people. Al hears people refer to him derogatorily as "Retro." This is the word New Californians have adopted for the possessed, who they believe to be a new street gang that likes to dress in old fashioned clothing. Capone flees the scene and is picked up by another possessed man in an antique convertible. He tells Al that the possessed are grouping together to take over the world so that they can hide the planet from the sky. Al decides to go with him to meet the other possessed.

Capone quickly takes charge of the possessed in San Angeles. He orchestrates a capture of city hall and meets with the mayor while his lieutenants begin insuring the possession of all the civil servants in the building, including the Police Commissioner. Capone tells the mayor that he needs to employ some civil servants who are not compromised by the disorientation that possession brings, because he intends to set up his own government and control all of New California. He asks the mayor if he will help him run the city, telling him that he will raise his salary, and will guarantee that he, and his family, will not be subject to possession. The mayor refuses, and Capone, incensed, produces a baseball bat.

On Guyana, a moon of Ombrey, naval psychologist Dr. Riley Dobbs is using a device that allows a patient's memories to form an artificial environment to try to determine what precisely happened to Gerald Skibbow at the moment of his possession. However, Skibbow is in an extreme state of post-traumatic dementia. At first he will only show them his family's old apartment on Earth. At their insistence, he begins to show them horror scenes from the events on Lalonde.

Louise, Genevieve, Carmitha, and Titreano are nearly to Bynam, where they hope to get air transport to the capital city, Norfolk. Louise admits that she is pregnant and terrified about the fate of her baby on Norfolk. They notice the buildup of a layer of red clouds off in the distance, as they arrive in Bytham and head for the local aerodrome. Titreano tells them that he can feel that some of the citizens in the town are already possessed and that his kind will be able to feel his presence and will sense that he is traveling with, and perhaps aiding, the living. Carmitha produces a shotgun from her wagon and gives it to Louise. She volunteers to flee the town, to make it look like Titreano is attempting to possess them. Carmitha leaves on her wagon, and Louise, Genevieve and Titreano go to the aerodrome, where they convince the local delivery pilot to fly them to Norfolk. On the plane Titreano admits to Louise that his real name, when he was alive, was Fletcher Christian, and that he will be forever known, to his shame, as a mutineer.



Chapter 4

On Ombrey, Hiltch and Xingu security believe they have eliminated all possessed contamination except for the four towns in the Montbridge community that were stops made by the contaminated bus prior to its elimination. Hiltch helps organize military to isolate Montbridge. A curfew will be imposed for the night and the military will search the towns in the morning. In Exnall, one of the four contaminated Montbridge communities, Chief Inspector Neville Latham tells his police force that the curfew notification is being done in such a way that those out and about will know that they are suppose to return to their homes, but people who have already gone to sleep, which is most of the population, will not learn there was a curfew till the morning. This is to prevent panic. However, local reporter Finnualla O'Meara, having illegally intercepted the information sent to Latham about a possible energy virus loose in Montbridge, wakes up the whole town with a priority broadcast about the curfew. A panic ensues and people begin marching on the police station. On the way there, possession sweeps through the citizenry. Latham has O'Meara arrested and tries to prepare for the arrival of the mob.

Hiltch learns that a large number of people are out on foot in Exnall. He asks Princess Kirsten to address the people of Exnall and call for calm, but is told that no announcement can be delivered because the Exnall communication network is experiencing technical difficulties, and that satellite images of Exnall are beginning to blur in the same way that they did on Lalonde. In Exnall, Finnualla is released from prison by a now possessed Latham. Dawn arrives and the streets of Latham are deserted except for one woman standing in the middle of the access road to town. Hiltch approaches her alone, recognizing her as Angelina Gallagher, one of the missing embassy staffers. She identifies herself as Annette Ekelund. She tells Hiltch that the possessed do not consider zero-tau a real threat because they can simply leave the captured body and return in another. She says that the possessed and the living are evenly matched on Ombrey, and that the critical battle lines are elsewhere. She proposes a truce and stalemate, with the possessed to retain possession of Montbridge and to pledge to not expand beyond. Princess Kirsten, who has been listening in, refuses, and possessed swarm out of nearby houses, each with one un-possessed in tow. Ekelund tells Hiltch that any attempt to take Montbridge will result in death and destruction both here and elsewhere on Ombrey and she threatens to immediately slay all of the hostages at hand, including a young girl she has brought up to Hiltch. The Princess decides to tentatively agree to the stalemate, but Hiltch adds on his own that he be allowed to take the young girl to safety as part of the deal. Ekelund agrees, the swap is made, and the temporary truce begins.

Chapter 3-4 Analysis

Capone is initially reluctant to join his fellow possessed, and he is deeply suspicious of their idea to "hide themselves from the sky." This instinctual behavior of the possessed, which involves first forming a red cloud of energized water vapor over their location and then, eventually, folding the entire occupied planet away in a separate causal domain, is explained as resulting from their primal fear of gazing upon the void of space, which



reminds them of the emptiness of their tormented afterlife. All of the possessed feel this urge, even Capone, but the pull of this instinct on him and on some of the other possessed leaders, is tempered by their strong will. They were leaders when they were alive, movers and shakers, and this new instinct to hide themselves conflicts with their desire for power and fame. Capone lets this desire fuel his ambition. More than any other possessed, he seeks to reestablish and then surpass the position of power he held when he was the king of prohibition-era Chicago.

Louise and Carmitha argue over the social structure of Norfolk, and Carmitha, who is trying to dispel the girl's naiveté about the disparate lives of the gentry and the workers, tells Louise that Grant Kavanaugh has fathered several bastard children among the gentry and paid Carmitha for sex recently. Carmitha eventually apologizes for the outburst. Louise, who is old enough to understand on at least some level the inequalities of life on Norfolk, nevertheless defends her estate and her father's relationship to his workers. The views of the two women, as is often common from two people on opposite sides of a socioeconomic dichotomy, contain both truth and exaggeration. Carmitha correctly points out the injustice of the Norfolk social structure and the hypocrisy of the Kavanaugh family's piety when contrasted with Grant's sexual promiscuity. However, she also betrays her bias against the ruling class by unfairly describing Louise as spoiled and ignorant. Louise has been groomed as an inheritor of her father's vast estate and business. Though her political education is scant, she has received a thorough education on every aspect of managing the estate, and has worked hard most of her life helping to perform tasks in every aspect of the business, down to the most menial. Louise in turn tells Carmitha that the social structure of Norfolk allows the Romany the freedom to roam and always find work. The fact that they are not wealthy, and are always at the beck and call of the noble families is the price they pay for being unwilling to establish their own permanent estates for which they would have to maintain a generational responsibility. However, Louise has her prejudices too, describing the commoners as uneducated and lazy if left to their own devices.

Titreano's admittance that he is the famed mutineer Fletcher Christian brings another famous character into the ranks of the possessed. Christian is infamous for his role as leader of the mutineers on the *Bounty*, for years known as the only mutiny in the history of the British Navy. The *Bounty* was on a scientific mission to collect local plants from the Pacific island of Tahiti. After almost a year on the island, the *Bounty* crew had acclimated to the local culture and many of them, including Christian, had taken Tahitian wives. This is one likely reason why, on the return voyage, Christian and 18 other sailors mutinied and put Bligh and his loyalist off the *Bounty*, which they then sailed back west into the Pacific islands, eventually settling on Pitcairn Island. Fletcher tells Louise that he is shamed by his act of mutiny, but that he still believes that it was the correct decision, and one that he make again if placed in the same position.



Chapters 5-6

Chapters 5-6 Summary

Chapter 5

The Udat returns to normal space. Dr. Alkad Mzu is among the debris surrounding the ship and has been protected from the vacuum of space by a special suit. Captain Meyer has sustained serious neurological damage from Tranquility's affinity commands. Mzu is brought on board and urges Udat to make one more swallow so that their course will be untraceable.

In San Angeles, Jezzibella is held up from departure by Capone, who has commandeered the space port for an impending attack on the nearby asteroid systems. Jezzibella convinces Capone to allow her to become his consultant, telling him that New California is a "small potato" planet and that he should set his sights higher.

Oenone arrives in Jupiter, with Syrinx in zero-tau, and bringing Laton's last communication about what has happened on Pernik. Laton's final address is played to Edenist Consensus. Laton tells them that Adamist response, which will consist of combating the possessed with military force, is fruitless. The source of the possessed invasion must be sought out and the dimensional rupture closed. He apologizes for his former crimes and tells them that the knowledge that human beings have immortal souls has profound implication for the future of Edenism.

Louise, Genevieve, and Fletcher Christian have taken refuge at Louise's Aunt Celina's home in Norwich. Fletcher tells Louise that the possessed have already infiltrated the capital city. He believes that Norfolk is lost, and that they should seek transportation off the planet. Louise agrees and tells them that she intends to seek out Joshua Calvert on Tranquility.

Chapter 6

On Tranquility, Lone consults with Tranquility about the escape of Dr. Mzu. They both believe that Mzu will seek to recover the Alchemist from whatever location she has stored it and use it to wipe out Omurta's star. Monica Foulkes, who was part of the security detail assigned by the Confederation to watch Dr. Mzu, is reprimanded by her superior, Lady Tessa. Tessa tells Foulkes that the Udat is not capable of delivering the Alchemist and that therefore Mzu will likely switch ships as soon as possible. The Navy does not know the nature of the Alchemist or where it may be hidden.

Samual Alexandrovich, First Admiral of the Confederacy Naval, travels to Jupiter to hear the Edenist's news about the possessed. He then meets with the Confederation Assembly, the ruling representative body, on the planet Avon. The Assembly hears Laton's information about the possession virus. Assembly agrees to a lock-down on all civilian and commercial spaceflight and to mobilize the entire fleet to enforce the



isolation of afflicted worlds while a solution is researched. The Tyrathca ambassador tells the Assembly that her people have decided to leave the Confederation and isolate themselves from humans. The Kiint ambassador tells the Assembly that the Kiint have faced the same problem in their past and survived, but that they will not help humanity solve its problem.

On Valisk, the Rubra personality which controls the bitek habitat has discovered that something is amiss. He begins to put the pieces together, and suspect Dariat is responsible for blocking his observation of the preliminary events of the invasion. He finds Dariat's corpse in an apartment, but, unbeknownst to Rubra, Dariat has possessed the body of fifteen year old Horgan; Dariat is helping the possessed, lead by Kiera Salter, Marie Skibbow's possessor, to spread. The possessed take over a tavern frequented by Blackhawk pilots. Kiera tortures three of them, facilitating their possession and the subsequent possession of their ship's personalities by the dead.

Chapters 5-6 Analysis

Given his past crimes, which include mass murder, manipulation, and torture, it is ironic that it falls to Laton to warn the Edenists about the true nature of the energy virus. Indeed, until the Edenist Consensus hears Laton's final address, most Edenists are convinced that his presence on Lalonde is the cause of the disturbance, and this results in a delay in understanding the true nature of the invasion. The fear of the mass murderer Laton masks the real danger. Edenists can upload their personalities to the shared population at death, usually through the bitek habitats or the affinity-linked voidhawks. This means that an address from a dead Edenist is not simply a recording, but contains the real-time emotional reactions and even new cognitive output from the dead personality. This will later be demonstrated in Syrinx's contact with the long deceased founder of Edenism, Wing-Tsit. However, it seems unlikely that Oenone, the only voidhawk present at Pernik when Laton sacrifices himself to stop the spread of the possessed on the habitat, would allow Laton to link his personality to the Edenist pool at death. It is even less likely that Laton, one of whose crimes was the infection and destruction of a living bitek habitat with a psychic virus, would be allowed into the affinity pool of any habitat. Therefore, it seems likely that Laton's final address has to be merely a recording, and this is indicated by the text, as Laton attempts to dispense all of his advice, contrition, and parting in one long statement. Had the message been delivered in normal Edenist fashion, he would be able to further interact with the living Edenists, answering questions and helping to come up with solution.

Laton's final statement harkens back to his willingness to challenge Edenist principles. The Edenist practice of uploading a dying person's identity through the affinity link at the time of death does seem to be at odds with the knowledge that, as they now know from their contact with the possessed, some part of the personality, or soul, already survives death. The Edenists have come to look upon affinity continuity as life after death.

Kiera's succeeds with the Blackhawk captains where she failed with Syrinx. Syrinx too is tortured to facilitate possession and eventually possession of her voidhawk Oenone.



Torture has been the first step to possession since the beginning of the invasion. The possessed torture a human subject, while a possessor waits in the void beyond, hovering above the tortured conscious and offering relief. When the living human accepts the proffered help, the new possessor invades the body, pushing the real personality into a cellar in the mind. The possessor can then manipulate and torture the real personality for information. Thus a possessor inhabiting the body of a starship captain can continue torturing the captive consciousness for information about how to operate the starship.



Chapters 7-8

Chapters 7-8 Summary

Chapter 7

Capone and Jezzibella have become lovers, and Capone's Organization has effectively seized control of New California. Many of the possessed want to use their red cloud to hide the planet, removing it to another universe, but Capone is against it. He uses his control of the satellite defense network to bombard locations where the red clouds appear. He makes an impassioned speech to his lieutenants, telling them that if the possessed attempt to hide, the Edenists will come after them. They must not turn and run, but most fight here and now.

Edenist forces contact Rubra and tell him about Laton and the possessed virus. They offer Rubra help in stopping the spread of the virus on Valisk, but Rubra chooses to go it alone. News does slip to the general population on Valisk that Laton's ship, the Yaku, made a stop there before the disaster on Pernik, and that the contamination of Valisk by Laton is a possibility. Many of the docked ships request permission from Rubra to depart, but all requests are denied. Rubra is complying with the blockade and isolation of Valisk. Rubra informs the populace of the identity of the three suspected possessed loose on the habitat. At the urging of Dariat, the possessed have been keeping a low profile as they spread through Valisk while Dariat himself continues in his attempts to undermine and wipe out the Rubra personality. However, a botched robbery attempt by a possessed leads to a riot that exposes the possessed to Rubra, and Kiera confronts the habitat's personality, telling him that the possessed will move into the open and convert his whole population and take over the habitat.

Chapter 8

Andre DuChamp brings the Villeneuve's Revenge to the asteroid Culey, where he purchases medical care for the badly injured Erick Thakrar.

In the New California system, Capone begins an invasion of the neighboring asteroid communities.

Louise uses her family connections to withdraw a large quantity of money from a Norwich bank and convert it to Jovian dollars, which can be used throughout the Confederation. She talks to Furay, pilot of the Far Realm, a ship in orbit, about passage for herself, Genevieve and Fletcher. Furay agrees to take them on as passengers, but cautions them that because of the naval spaceflight lockdown, the Far Realm must remain part of the naval squadron convoy to which it has been assigned, and that their next destination is unknown.

Louise's cousin Roberto, son of Celina, tells her that he recognizes the name Fletcher Christian and concludes that their traveling companion is using a fake name because he



is a rebel that they are protecting. He attempts to blackmail Louise for sex, telling her that he will go to the authorities and turn them in. He tries to rape Louise, but she knocks him out with the butt of Carmitha's shotgun. She tells Fletcher and, reckoning that Celina will side with her son, the two decide to take Genevieve and flee the planet. At the aerodrome, they are intercepted by authorities, but manage to slip out onto the tarmac, with Fletcher disguising himself as a naval officer. Quinn Dexter and Lawrence Dillon arrive in a jeep and confront them. Fletcher intervenes and Quinn Dexter, railing at Fletcher for being a traitor, begins to torture the mutineer, but is interrupted in his assault by a mysterious figure. A fire erupts and all flee as naval vehicles flood the scene. Louise, Genevieve and Fletcher find Furay and ascend to the Far Realm. Dexter and Dillon hijack a naval ship and William Elphinstone awakens on the edge of the fire, no longer possessed by the person who helped Louise, his former boss' daughter, escape.

Dr Mzu has left the Udat, and the Blackhawk and crew decide to swallow to the Sol system to turn themselves in and give information on Mzu. During the trip through the wormhole, something goes wrong, and a recording begins to play. It is Dr. Mzu, telling the crew that she has sabotaged the ship, as retribution for Udat's mercenary role in the squadron of ships that arrested her thirty years before in a battle in which her lover was killed. Udat and its crew are atomized, and spit out of the far end of the wormhole.

Chapters 7-8 Analysis

When Erick Thakrar single-handedly halts the invasion of the Villeneuve's Revenge by possessed, Andre Duchamp, the ship's parsimonious and seedy captain, promises his weapons officer the best medical care money can buy to repair the extensive bodily injuries he suffers during the invasion. Duchamp is an egomaniacal and paranoid captain, a Francophile who uses the derogatory word "Anglo" to disparage anyone with whom he is negotiating, arguing, or swindling. To Duchamp, anyone is an "Anglo" if he is costing Duchamp for money. Duchamp is a passionate man capable of love and affection, but this is always shines through his egocentric prism. His promise to Erick, made in the heat of battle, is made with real affection, but the affection is largely engendered by the fact that Erick's actions save Duchamp's life and property. Once they are safely away, and the unconscious Erick is being looked over by the Culey medical personnel, Duchamp's real concern, money, overrides his sense of compassion. As the doctor is discussing options for treatment, Duchamp keeps shying away from honoring his battle promise of getting Erick the best treatment. When he selects the third best options, which will repair the damage to Erick, but not as quickly or as painlessly, Duchamp is called out on his promise by Madeleine, another of his officers, who has to shame Duchamp into fulfilling his promise. He does so not out of affection for Erick, but because breaking his promise will make Duchamp look bad and damage his honor.

The Roberto character is a trite snapshot of the stereotypically sleazy momma's boy. Hamilton introduces the character with a few short paragraphs when describing the new setting of Celina's house, and with sledgehammer foreshadowing, mentions that Louise never really liked her cousin. Then a few pages later, with little or no further

development, Roberto attempts to rape Louise, is knocked out, and then disappears from the story. This rather weak character development is sometimes an unfortunate consequence of an author trying to tell such a sprawling, action-packed story, but Hamilton is guilty of this frequently through his narrative and it is in many ways one of the weakest points of the series. He quite often introduces a new character by name and writes a bit of biographical detail before simply using the character to open up a door and get blown to bits in an explosion a page later. In a series that demands that its reader keep a rather extensive catalogue of important characters, ships, cities, locations, and technologies in his head, the practice of giving names and quick detail to so many extras is confusing and seems to serve little point.



Chapters 9-10

Chapters 9-10 Summary

Chapter 9

Nicolai Penovich, a naval officer from one of the captured asteroids, is brought before Capone on New California. He tells Capone that he wants to join the Organization and take advantage of Capone's policy of not possessing employees with important information or skills. He tells Capone that he knows of a source of anti-matter and will help the Organization take control of and use it. Capone agrees tentatively. Later, Jezzibella must explain to Capone what anti-matter is and that if it is to be used safely, it must be transported on ships free of possessed. Capone tells his lieutenants to begin building teams of non-possessed to man anti-matter transports. He tells them to select family men and to offer their families places in San Angeles's finest resort as "guests." Capone sends two waves of attacking ships against the Edenist habitats orbiting nearby Yosemite. As a result of the Edenist voidhawks' ability to spy on New California, the Edenists are well prepared and the attacks are resoundingly defeated. Voidhawks spy another wave leaving New California, but are puzzled by the jump coordinates, which seem as though they will take the ships to a location containing no known inhabited systems.

On Valisk, Kiera and the possessed have taken control of most of the habitat's population and she meets with her advisers in the boardroom of Magellanic Ltd., Rubra's old corporation. Dariat tells them that Rubra could sabotage the habitat's ability to support human life, but that he is being held in check by the hellhawks, as the possessed blackhawks are now called, who have the destructive capability of destroying the habitat in response. Dariat is trying to subvert and destroy the Rubra personality but is finding this a much more difficult task now that Rubra is aware of the danger. All of Rubra's affinity capable descendants have been placed in zero-tau so that he cannot organize them to rebel against the possessed. Many of the possessed want to begin the process of hiding Valisk away in a new universe, but Kiera tells them that she wants to increase their population, which is only nine hundred thousand, before they do so.

Hiltch meets with Princess Kirsten and makes the suggestion that Montbridge be assaulted by bitek enhanced soldiers, who, unlike mechanized Adamist soldiers, will be able to function properly in proximity to the possessed. This suggestion violates a Kulu cultural taboo, as the Kulu empire is staunchly anti-Edenist. The Princess tells Hiltch that he will have to take his recommendation directly to King Alastair on Kulu.

The Tantu, one of the naval ships orbiting Norfolk, breaks communication and heads for a jump location. The navy suspects that rebels have taken control of the ship, but Louise and Fletcher know that the culprit is Quinn Dexter. Fletcher urges Layia, the Far Realm's captain to pursue the fleeing ship, but she refuses. Fletcher tells Louise that



Quinn Dexter is worse than the possessed and that he must be stopped. Louise tells him that she has learned that the Far Realm's next stop is Mars and that, as Quinn Dexter has already revealed that he intends to travel to Earth, they will be able to track him down.

Chapter 10

During a press conference on New California, Capone refutes rumors that his Organization is planning to attack the Confederation. He tells the reporters that he believes the possessed and the living can live together and even suggests that the Confederation explore the possibility of cloning bodies for the possessed to inhabit. He proposes a meeting with Confederation president Haaker and says that he would even consider petitioning for New California's re-admittance to the Assembly.

On Valisk, Rubra is helping the remaining non-possessed by guiding them to safe locations. Rubra learns that Dariat has assumed the body of young Horgan, and he confronts his former descendant. Dariat is still consumed by his quest for vengeance, and tells Rubra that he will personally hunt down and destroy the Rubra personality system by system. Rubra is full of admiration for the will of Dariat, who he calls his most promising descendant. He attempts to bribe Dariat to turn on the possessed by offering his descendant information about his dead lover Anastasia. Kiera, surrounded by a retinue of possessed morphed into young, attractive bodies, makes a propaganda video about life on the habitat, which accuses the Confederation of slandering the possessed, who only want to live peacefully alongside the living, and invites young radicals to break the blockade and join them in the paradise they will make on Valisk.

The Lady Mac arrives at Tranquility and is greeted with a hero's welcome. It is the only ship that returns from the mercenary fleet. The crew and passengers learn of the spread of the possessed to other worlds.

Parker Higgins, lone's head of Laymil research, presents naval authorities with the newly discovered revelation of the Laymil's struggle and eventual defeat by a force which they called a "reality dysfunction," and which greatly resembles the possessed phenomenon that is gripping the Confederation. The navy sends him back to Tranquility, accompanied by a team of specialists, to attempt to learn what methods, effective and ineffective, the Laymil may have used against this reality dysfunction.

Erick Thakrar recovers consciousness and is visited by a naval operative who brings him up to date on the current possessed situation. Erick demands that the Villeneuve's Revenge be impounded and its crew arrested for piracy and murder. The operative tells him that the navy will not be able to keep DuChamp from posting bail and disappearing, and that it is therefore not a good moment to make the arrest. A disgusted Thakrar requests reassignment and a transfer to Tranquility for his convalescence.

Dr. Mzu has chartered the Samaku to take her to Dorados, where she will rendezvous with allies and begin planning for the annihilation of Omurta's star.



The voidhawk Intari arrives on Norfolk, and the captain informs the naval squadron of the possessed situation. The Tantu, now believed to be under the control of the possessed, has already left the system with one of the squadron's ships in pursuit. On the Far Realm, Furay learns that Louise and Fletcher are aware of the true nature of the disturbance on Norfolk. He is upset with them for this deception, but quickly concedes that neither he, nor anyone else in the naval squadron would have believed them if they had come forward earlier.

Chapters 9-10 Analysis

Hamilton gives no information about the methods the 27th century uses to find, gather, and contain anti-matter. This could be something of a sore point for the scientifically educated 21st century reader, who knows that current physics seems to preclude the possibility of simply flying out to some location in space, collecting anti-matter, and transporting it.

The Rubra personality does not merely run the habitat, he is the habitat. This is true of all so-called bitek habitats. They are living systems constructed with biological and mechanical parts. Voidhawks are considered living entities as well and have their own personalities. All of these creations operate on the original Edenist discovery of affinity. Affinity links the mental thoughts of all Edenists together. The Edenist hive-mind is emotional, not computational. It links thoughts together, but does not pool knowledge, and the affinity link can be consciously suppressed to allow for moments of privacy, or focused to allow for one on one mental communication between two linked individuals.

Kelly Tirrel has been greatly changed by her experiences on Lalonde. It is not the combat trauma which has wrought the greatest change, but her contact with Shaun Wallace and the knowledge of life beyond death. She is now haunted by Shaun's description of the unbearable void that the damned are fleeing. In many ways, her reaction to the Lalonde experience is opposite to that of Father Horst. Horst is convinced that the void the possessed describe is not the full story of existence after death, and his faith in the Christian afterlife has been strengthened by his experiences. He is invigorated by the new knowledge and is more convinced than ever that a life of charity and compassion has its reward in the afterlife. Kelly has been enervated by the experience, and she now dreads death so much that she is terrified of all risk. She is no longer the indefatigable, daring reporter she once was and she lashes out at those around her in her depression. She intercedes almost violently when another reporter tries to "steal" Jay's story without paying the young girl for it. Kelly then assaults her Time Universe boss when his enthusiasm leads him to insensitively celebrate the things that occurred to her and the children on Lalonde. She tells Joshua that she is considering using prolonged periods of zero-tau sleep to extend her life.



Chapters 11-12

Chapters 11-12 Summary

Chapter 11

A recovering Syrinx vacations on Eden, the original Edenist habitat that orbits Jupiter. She has taken a new, younger lover named Aulie and together they walk in the parkland of the habitat. One day, Syrinx walks alone in the park until she stumbles upon the house of Wing-Tsit, founder of Edenism. He tells her that he has been dead for hundreds of years and that he can talk to her in a physical form because she is not really visiting Eden, but has been placed in a protective psychophysical environment. She is really in a bed in the care center in one of the habitats orbiting Saturn. Her access to her memories of the torture she experienced has been blocked. She will be exposed to them in a controlled manner that will allow her to deal with the trauma. This is done and Syrinx survives the initial contact with the trauma.

Kelly Tirrel releases her report on the events at Lalonde, and news of possession and life beyond death sweeps through the Confederation, causing considerable unrest. Lone asks Joshua to lead a mission to hunt down and capture or kill Dr. Mzu. She reveals to him the secret of the Alchemist and her belief that Mzu intends to destroy an entire world. The Lady Mac will be made an official government starship of Tranquility, and thus be exempt from the star travel quarantine.

Hellhawks deliver Kiera Saltera's enticing invitation to systems throughout the Confederation, and despite attempts to suppress the contents of the message, the public, and particularly the youth of many settlements latches on to Kiera's vision of life in paradise with the possessed on Valisk.

Chapter 12

Al Capone is told about a new possessor named Ambar, who died during the Garissa genocide and who has information on a powerful weapon known as the Alchemist. Capone learns that he should seek out Dr. Alkad Mzu for information about the weapon. Capone then forces one of his lieutenants out of the body of a naval commander named Kingsley Pryor. Capone believes Pryor will be more valuable as an adviser if he is not possessed and he tells Pryor that his family will be kept safe and allowed to remain non-possessed if he cooperates.

On Tranquility, Father Horst conducts a memorial service for the people lost on Lalonde. Father Horst gives Joshua a crucifix on a chain to keep him safe on his travels. Joshua is approached by a cosmonik named Beaulieu, who claims to have been a friend of Warlow and asks if she may take his place on the Lady Mac. Joshua agrees and the Lady Mac leaves Tranquility.



In Exnall, a possessed named Moyo remembers the end of the meeting between Ralph Hiltch and Annette Ekelund. Ekelund told all of the possessed to return to their houses and ensure the possession of their captives. Moyo let his captive, a ten year old boy, free. Now Ekelund and the more militant possessed have left Exnall to see to the conquering of the rest of Montbridge and the possessed that remain are trying to learn to live in their new world. Moyo meets another possessed named Stephanie Ash, who tells him that she was murdered in front of her children.

Chapters 11-12 Analysis

Ione Saldana, like Louise Kavanaugh, is carrying a child of Joshua Calvert, though in Ione's case, carried is perhaps the wrong term, as the fetus is gestating in one of Tranquility's offspring niches. Ione herself was conceived in this fashion and began her affinity connection with Tranquility before her proper time of birth. Ione becomes Joshua's lover before she announces that she is the new Lord of Ruin, the ruler of the Tranquility habitat. She is well aware of Joshua's promiscuity, which has led him to sleep with not only Louise Kavanaugh, but many of the young females living on Tranquility. Ione is strongly attracted to Joshua. However, her decision to make him the father of her first child, the likely heir to her rule, is based on her belief that his instinctual ability to sense both opportunity and danger indicates that he has telepathic abilities, abilities she hopes will be passed on to their offspring.

Hamilton's description of the meeting of Moyo and Stephanie Ash and life in the possessed town of Exnall is the first time that he has described the activities of the possessed without having non-possessed present. He is, in effect, giving them their own story for the first time. Moyo and Stephanie's actions add to the growing number of instances where the possessed behave compassionately.



Chapters 13-14

Chapters 13-14 Summary

Chapter 13

On Trafalgar, Dr. Gilmore discovers that the possessed can be detected by looking for a certain charge of static electricity. Samuel Alekandrovich tells Gilmore that they must discover a way to force a possessed out of a body on the spot.

Quinn Dexter, having converted the Tantu's crew to possessed, arrives early. His entry into the system is thwarted by the Sol security's insistence on a security passcode. Tantu is forced to flee the system and Dexter punishes the possessed who is in control of the body of the Tantu's captain. The newly arrived possessed insists that the captain tricked him and without the information about the security codes, but Dexter is unforgiving, and after he forces the possessed to vacate the body, begins torturing the captain.

Dr. Mzu arrives in the Dorados asteroid colony on starship Samaku, and learns of the Confederation quarantine.

Andre Duchamp learns that the Dechal, a ship whose crew is in a deadly feud with his own, is docked at the same asteroid. He tells Madeleine and Dominique to sneak Erick out of the hospital. Erick awakens as he is being moved. After Madeleine and Dominique tell him about the Dechal and Duchamp's plan for a hasty departure, Erick uses his neural nanonics to inform the navy of the situation, hoping that the Villeneuve's Revenge can be stopped. Madeleine, Dominique and Erick are nearly to their ship when they are confronted by the Dechal's captain, who has hired some enhanced mercenaries to get even with Erick and Duchamp. The navy team intervenes, killing the Dechal's captain and the mercenaries, but in the confusion Madeleine and Dominique succeed in smuggling Erick aboard the Villeneuve's Revenge, which debarks, taking much of the asteroid's docking facility with it.

On Guyana, a still disturbed Gerald Skibbow sees his daughter Marie, possessed by Kiera Saltera, advertising for Valisk. The news that his daughter is still alive and a hostage of the possessed sends Gerald into frenzy and he must be sedated.

Chapter 14

Father Horst meets with Joseph Saro, Tranquility's bishop, and tells him that he saw the demon that Quinn Dexter unleashed through satanic ritual and which is responsible for the invasion of the armies of the dead. He tells Saro that his experience on Lalonde has codified his faith, and he reiterates what he told Joshua regarding his belief that there is more to the afterlife than what the possessed say.



Quinn Dexter, meanwhile, is forced to delay his arrival on Earth. He takes the Tantu to Nyvan, one of the first worlds explored and colonized by humans.

Ralph Hiltch meets with King Alastair II on Kulu and proposes an alliance with the Edenists in the war against the possessed. Alastair decides that the political fallout from this alliance is an acceptable risk if Edenist bitek warriors can help turn the tide against the possessed. Alastair sends Hiltch to naval command to begin planning a tactical assault on Montbridge.

Valisk Hellhawks are beginning to return filled with Confederation citizens, mostly drawn from the bored youth of backwater settlements, who have fallen for Kiera Saltera's propaganda about living in paradise on the possessed-controlled habitat. Throughout the Confederation, Saltera's fleks are becoming known as the Deadknight tapes, and her followers as the Deadknights, and they begin following her fashion quirk of tying a red scarf around one of their ankles. The new arrivals to Valisk are tortured and possessed.

Rubra sabotages Valisk's SD platforms and helps the Confederation navy destroy Valisk's manufacturing centers, neutralizing its ability to produce weapons. After the bombardment, Rubra informs Kiera that the navy will not allow her to reconstitute Valisk's armaments or manufacturing facilities. An enraged Kiera demands that Dariat be found and brought to her.

Duchamp finds his crew another charter, working for Capone's Organization in the New California system. Madeleine and Dominique are repulsed by the idea of working for the possessed, but Duchamp assures them that they will not be made to dock at possessed facilities or intermingle with the possessed. Moreover, they are to patrol the system merely to add to the size of the Organization's fleet, but are not expected to fight. When Erick agrees to the charter, Madeleine and Dominique reluctantly concur.

Jezzibella and Al Capone's lieutenants present him with a gift of a possessed Blackhawk to be his flagship. Cameron Leung is the name of the possessor, and he has altered the hellhawk's appearance so that it resembles Buck Roger's rocket ship. Capone is thrilled, and uses the ship to watch the launching of the Organization's fleet. The Edenist voidhawk Galega monitors this departure, and her captain Aralia warns the confederation navy that the fleet's destination is Arnstadt.

On Guyana, a redheaded woman possessed by Gerald's former wife, Loren, breaks him out of the psychiatric ward.

Chapters 13-14 Analysis

Erick Thakrar's misadventures as a navy spy on the Villeneuve's Revenge continue. His frustration has been mounting since he is assigned to spy on Duchamp, who the navy suspected of smuggling and piracy. The navy's suspicions are confirmed early in Thakrar's mission, when Duchamp attacks a family trading vessel, robbing it of cargo and leaving the family in an escape vessel. During the attack, Thakrar, who is the



Villeneuve's Revenge's weapons officer, tries to disable the ship without killing anyone, but is dismayed to hear that the strike has killed a teenage girl. He immediately contacts the navy and demands that they arrest Duchamp for piracy and murder, but the navy refuses, hoping that Thakrar's position of trust on the ship will lead them to bigger crimes. Thakrar saves the life of one of the crew in a barroom brawl by killing one of the attackers from a ship called the Dechal. This and his single-handed thwarting of the possessed attack on the Villeneuve's Revenge at Lalonde have endeared Thakrar to Duchamp. This relationship has a great deal of irony to it. Duchamp loves Thakrar as much as a man like Duchamp can love anyone but himself. However, Thakrar despises his captain and hopes to see him behind bars. There is further irony in Duchamp's insistence that Thakrar be rescued from the hospital. Though it could be argued that Duchamp and the crew are saving Thakrar from the possibility that the captain of the Dechal will break into the hospital and do him harm, it is more likely that moving Thakrar into a deadly gunfight and onto the Villeneuve's Revenge is placing him in even more danger. Hamilton certainly seems to be trying to evoke some dark comedy out of the situation.

King Alastair's decision to use bitek warriors to combat the possessed contains many political thorns for the Confederation. The Kulu Empire's ban on Edenist affinity has been in place long enough to become an ideology and, to many of his citizen's, Alastair will be seen as making a deal with the devil. The King could face stiff opposition, and the political fallout could rival the great break between the Kulu Empire and the Lords of Ruin. King Alastair, Princess Kirsten, and all of the ruling Kulu monarchy are Saldanas, like lone of Tranquility. The break comes many generations before, when lone's ancestor, the first Lord of Ruin, adopts the Edenist affinity gene and seeds Tranquility. For this crime, and for his stubborn and, to his family, inexplicable obsession with the study of the defunct Laymil civilization, the first Lord of Ruin and all of his affinity-linked line are disowned. Tranquility becomes its own city-state, outside of the Confederation, and the Lords of Ruin make it a popular habitat by offering it as a tax shelter for Confederation businesses. The rift has not been violent, but it has been maintained long enough to acquire a great deal of cultural force. Hiltch compounds the complications of his request further, by telling Alastair that the bitek security sergeants created on Tranquility, and used for the habitat's security, would be the best starting templates to construct bitek warriors capable of handling the possessed.



Chapters 15-16

Chapters 15-16 Summary

Chapter 15

Louise, Genevieve, and Fletcher Christian arrive on Mars. On the voyage, Fletcher learns that with concentration he can minimize the disruptive effects he has on nearby electronics. To avoid complications involving the quarantine, the captain of the Far Realm devises a way to finagle passports for each of them.

In Exnall, Moyo and Stephanie Ash have become lovers. They take it upon themselves to try to feed the starving and destitute non-possessed children of Exnall. Stephanie wants Moyo to help her lead the children to safety on the border of Montbridge.

Wing-Tsit convinces Syrinx that she should conquer her fear of the unknown by journeying to the Kiint home world to ask them about their past experience with the possessed.

Dr. Mzu meets with Garissan refugee and now successful businessman Ikela. Ikela captains one of the starships originally sent to deploy the Alchemist. When the mission fails and Garissa is ravaged by the Omurtans, the naval officers of the original Alchemist mission, including Dr. Mzu and Ikela, make plans to prepare for a new deployment of the Alchemist against the Omurtans. This mission will have to wait thirty years for the end of the Confederation embargo against Omurta. Ikela is to sell off the antimatter in his warship and use it to start a business. This business will fund their second mission. Mzu reminds Ikela of his mission and upbraids him for not having a starship ready for her arrival. She asks him to call a meeting of the Garissan loyalists in Dorados. Ikela attempts to persuade Mzu to drop the mission of revenge, but she blackmails him, telling him that she will report his sale of anti-matter, a particularly heinous felony in the Confederation, if he does not help her complete their original mission. After the meeting, Mzu is approached by Ikela's daughter Voi, who tells Mzu that the older Garissan loyalists have, like her father, grown soft and will not help Mzu. She urges Mzu to allow Voi's group of younger Garissan partisans to help her, but Mzu tells the young dissident that she will not entrust the mission to complete strangers.

Joshua tracks the Udat to Narok and learns that Mzu switched ships and headed for Dorados, while Meyer and the Udat filed a flight plan for the Sol system. During these inquiries, he learns from his Narok contacts that other parties have been through the port and inquired after Dr. Mzu. Joshua learns that Norfolk is completely covered in the red cloud of the possessed and he is stricken with worry and guilt over Louise.

On Guyana, Loren smuggles Gerald into the apartment of her possessed, a smuggler with contacts in the Ombrey underground. She tells Gerald that they must go to Valisk to rescue Marie, but that it would be too hazardous for them to travel together. She uses



cosmetic nanonics to permanently alter Gerald's appearance and charters a flight out of system for him. Loren allows herself to be identified as a possessed by Guyana surveillance, but is shocked when Dr. Dobbs addresses her over the intercom by name. He tells her that he understands why she has freed Gerald, but that her former husband is too unstable to attempt the rescue of Marie. Dobbs offers Loren aid, saying that Gerald can be made a citizen of Ombrey and given the best care, and that they can work together to devise a plan to liberate Marie. However, Loren refuses to trust the psychiatrist and as marines close in on her position, she blasts away a section of the hull and her possessed body explodes in the vacuum of space. The diversion allows Gerald to successfully board the Quadin, listed under an alias as a member of the crew, and the ship departs.

Chapter 16

Monica Foulkes tracks Dr. Mzu to the Dorados, where she meets up with Edenist operative Samuel, on the same mission. They agree to merge their forces. Samuel points out that while Mzu must be stopped from her likely plan to destroy Omurta, killing her may do even more harm, because as a member of the ranks of the possessed, she could bring knowledge of the Alchemist to the likes of Capone. The Edenists deploy 70,000 affinity-linked spiders in Dorados to attempt to locate Mzu.

The Garissan loyalists meet with Mzu about deploying the Alchemist. A few at the meeting, including Ikela, seem reluctant to carry out the mission, but they are quickly overridden by the majority, who agree to support Mzu. Mzu leaves the meeting to allow the loyalists to make their decision. Outside, Voi shows Mzu one of the Edenist spiders and reasoning that the sudden infestation of a foreign species of all male spiders is not a natural phenomenon, convinces Mzu that the loyalist meeting has been undermined. Voi spirits Mzu away, just as Foulkes and Samuel raid the meeting. Ikela is killed by one of his co-conspirators during the raid, and Foulkes interrogates Feira Ile, the loyalist who betrayed the meeting to the authorities. Ile does not know where Mzu has gone, but one of his bodyguards tells Foulkes that he saw Mzu leaving with Ikela's daughter Voi.

Chapters 15-16 Analysis

As the first volume of a two-volume work, much of this book involves setting up the next, moving characters into the proximity of upcoming conflicting events, setting up pursuits and chases, and spawning new complications to be resolved later. In the last few chapters, the pace quickens to set up the action for the next book.

Joshua Calvert is truly heart-stricken when he sees the images of the red clouds of the possessed blanketing Louise's home world of Norfolk. Joshua's reaction to Louise's doom and his willingness to place his life and the safety of his ship in danger to rescue the children of Lalonde speaks to the quality of his character. His affection for Louise is genuine. Though he is something of a lothario, his use of women, while perhaps still not



in any way commendable, does not, as it does with some men, stem from a hatred of women, or a completely callous attitude toward their welfare.

Loren Skibbow seems to confirm Father Horst's belief that there is more to life after death than the void of the possessed. She tells Gerald that it was only her concern for Marie that drove her to remain among the possessed and take a body. When Gerald asks her where she would have gone otherwise, she tells him vaguely that she would have moved elsewhere. Gerald attempts to pin her down on this nature of this elsewhere, asking her if it is a separate reality from the void of the possessed, but she gives few hints. She attempts to absolve Gerald from the guilt he feels at uprooting his family from Earth only to bring them into such danger and ruin on Lalonde. She tells him that she is most concerned for Marie, and that if it had only been Gerald remaining, she would probably not have returned. This seems a callous comment, but Loren proves that she still cares for Gerald. When Dr. Dobbs attempts to reason with her, Loren accuses him of mistreating her husband and her rage is a clear sign of her affection for Gerald. Edenists and other humans equipped with affinity genes can use affinity linked animals as spies and servants. This ability has been used by several characters in the previous volumes. The affinity is strong enough to allow the watcher to control the movements of the animal through the bond. Compliance with affinity expressed commands is reinforced and rewarded by stimulating the sympathetic nervous system of the animal to release neural transmitters that affect a calming, or pleasurable state or sensation.



Characters

Joshua Calvert

Joshua Calvert is a young man of striking looks and charm. Though of respectable intelligence, Joshua's real strength lies in his uncanny ability to react instinctually to dynamic situations to profitable or life-saving effect.

Joshua's father dies when he is a young boy and Joshua never knows his mother. His father leaves him an old, spheroid battleship named the Lady Mac, after his father's favorite Shakespeare play, Macbeth. The battleship sustains considerable damage on his father's last mission and Joshua spends the first twenty-five years of his life accruing the money for its repair. While working as a scavenger in the Laymil orbital ruins, Joshua discovers an intact section of a crystalline memory storage cube. The memory is purchased for a small fortune on auction by Ione Saldana, the Lord of Ruin, who is continuing her ancestor's study of the Laymil and their mysterious end. Ione begins an affair with Joshua and eventually uses his DNA to conceive her first child, which begins a long gestation in a biological storage niche for bonding with the Tranquility habitat.

Joshua uses the payoff to finish repairs on the Lady Mac and begin his new career piloting between the stars. His exceptional instincts serve him well and he discovers a little used trade route between Lalonde and Norfolk. While on Norfolk, he has an affair with the young noblewoman Louise Kavanaugh, who becomes pregnant with Joshua's child. After the outbreak of the possessed virus on Lalonde, Joshua enlists the Lady Mac to be part of a mercenary assault fleet to Lalonde, thinking to protect his trade route. The fleet fails to oust the possessors and Lalonde falls, but not before the Lady Mac rescues the reporter Kelly Tirrel, Father Horst, and the surviving children of Aberdale, along with a host of Edenist survivors from a nearby habitat.

Louise Kavanaugh

The daughter of Grant and Marjorie Kavanaugh, members of the noble gentry class on Norfolk and owners of the vast Cricklade estate, Louise Kavanaugh, despite being a woman, has been groomed as the next heir of her father's estate. She thus possesses an extensive knowledge of the operations of the estate, but little education on other matters, such as the politics or history of the Confederation.

When Louise is sixteen, she meets Captain Joshua Calvert, who is visiting Norfolk on a trade mission, and will be taking on a shipment of Norfolk Tears supplied by Louise's father. Louise and Joshua have a brief affair while he is a guest at the Cricklade estate. After his departure, Louise learns that she is pregnant with Joshua's child, and she is filled with fear that her condition, which is considered shameful in Norfolk's puritanical society, will be found out. She is hoping to be able to conceal the pregnancy until



Joshua's promised return, at which point she can marry the successful starship captain and avoid the shame of bearing a child out of wedlock.

Louise is a young, beautiful woman, not yet come to her majority, with fair skin and hair. She is often accompanied by an eight year old shadow in the form of her younger sister Genevieve.

Syrinx

Syrinx is an Edenist, daughter of the voidhawk captain Athene, and is affinity linked to her voidhawk partner Oenone. Syrinx and Oenone are conceived together when the voidhawk egg carried by Athene's partner Iasius is bonded with Syrinx's human embryo. Syrinx gestates for several months inside of the young voidhawk Oenone before being separated and integrated into the Edenist community. Syrinx and Oenone are schooled together, each learning the complicated physics and cosmology necessary to safe travel the stars and especially to warp space and facilitate faster than light travel.

When they come of age, the young captain and her voidhawk companion join the navy for a five year tour. During this time, they learn the intricacies of space combat, helping as they do so to break up anti-matter smuggling rings. During one such encounter, Syrinx loses one of her brothers, who perishes along with his voidhawk partner in an anti-matter explosion. It is also at this time that she meets her future partner Joshua Calvert, when she boards his ship the Lady Mac upon suspicion of anti-matter smuggling.

After their tour in the navy is up, Syrinx and Oenone begin traveling between the stars as independent traders, but their career is seemingly cut short when, while stopped at the bitek habitat Pernik, Syrinx is kidnapped by the possessed and tortured. It is the Edenist arch-villain Laton who rescues Syrinx before she can be possessed. Oenone rockets away from the habitat before Laton scuttles it and races back to the Sol system carrying a physically damaged and emotionally scarred Syrinx.

Kelly Tirrel

A fearless reporter based out of the bitek habitat Tranquility, Kelly Tirrel embeds herself with a mercenary combat unit during the assault on Lalonde. She barely escapes with her life while helping to rescue Father Horst and the children of Aberdale. She is one of Joshua Calvert's many lovers.

Father Horst

Father Horst is the priest assigned to the new river community of Aberdale on Lalonde. When an Ivet revolt led by Quinn Dexter spawns an outbreak of possession by the dead, Aberdale disintegrates and Father Horst is forced to flee with the town's children in tow.



Ione Saldana

The Lord of Ruin, ruler of the habitat Tranquility, is a young woman of keen intelligence and playful spirit. Affinity linked to the habitat, she can observe anything that occurs on Tranquility. She is related by blood to the ruling family of the Kulu empire, but her existence is not acknowledged on Kulu because of a longstanding taboo against affinity and Edenism that her relationship with Tranquility violates. Like the previous Lords of Ruin, she believes that the study of the nearby Laymil orbital ruins is of supreme importance. She is one of Joshua Calvert's lovers and her first offspring is conceived using his DNA.

Dr. Alkad Mzu

The discoverer of the Alchemist weapon is a spry older woman of ruthless intelligence, all of which is bent upon exacting revenge upon Omurta, the world responsible for the genocide on her home world of Garissa. She is held captive on Tranquility at the Confederation's request for the last thirty years, but escapes and is at large.

Udat

A blackhawk starship linked to its captain Meyer, the Udat is responsible for the escape of Dr. Alkad Mzu from imprisonment on Tranquility.

Captain Meyer

Udat's captain and sometime friend of Joshua Calvert.

Voidhawks

Bitek creatures bred to travel naked through space and serve as vessels for human occupants, the voidhawks are sentient creatures that are affinity bonded to their Edenist captains.

Blackhawks

Blackhawks are a mutated variety of voidhawk. They are capable of greater speed and maneuverability than their cousins, but pay for this trait with shorter lifespans.

Genevieve Kavanaugh

Genevieve is Louise's younger sister.



Fletcher Christian/Titreano

Christian is the infamous second officer of the Bounty, who betrays his captain almost one thousand years before. He helps Louise and Genevieve Kavanaugh escape from Norfolk and considers it his mission to track down and stop the evil Quinn Dexter.

Quinn Dexter

Dexter is a Satanist of remarkable will, who is able to dominate weaker individuals and bend them to his desire. He is briefly possessed on Lalonde, but forces out his possessor. He somehow maintains the energy link to the beyond which allows him to manipulate and use vast quantities of energy, the so-called white fire of the possessed. He considers himself the captain of the forces of the dead, the newly arisen army of the Light Brother, his master Lucifer, who will use the possessed to conquer first the living and then heaven.

Lawrence Dillon

Lawrence is Quinn Dexter's right hand man.

Kiera Saltera/Marie Skibbow

Marie Skibbow is the middle daughter of Gerald and Loren, who run away from Aberdale before the outbreak of the possessed virus, but he cannot escape possession in the fall of Lalonde. Kiera Saltera, Marie's possessor, is the socialite wife of a failed politician. Following the fall of Lalonde, she travels to Valisk and becomes the leader of the possessed uprising on the habitat.

Annette Ekelund

The leader of the possessed on the Montbridge peninsula on Ombrey, Ekelund arranges a truce with Princess Kirsten that will cede the peninsula to the possessed if they promise not to spread beyond it.

Al Capone/Brad Lovegood

The infamous gangster of prohibition era Chicago finds himself reborn into the body of New California citizen Brad Lovegood. Capone is a natural leader and organizer of force. Ruthless and tyrannical, he always finds a way to get what he wants.



Edenists

Edenists use the specially implanted gene known as the affinity gene to allow them to perceive each others' thoughts.

Adamists

The majority of the Confederation population is made up of Adamists, who reject the notion of affinity as an abomination.

Rubra

Rubra is an Edenist with a ruthless business sense who rejects the interconnection of the Edenist affinity pool and establishes his own habitat called Valisk and separates himself from Edenist society. Upon his death Rubra fuses his personality with that of the Valisk habitat, and he has since been running the bitek environment and communicating via the affinity link with his many offspring living on the habitat.

Dariat

One of Rubra's descendants and thus affinity linked to the Rubra personality that operates the Valisk habitat, Dariat is being groomed by Rubra to take over and revive Rubra's business organization. However, when Rubra's intervention in Dariat's love life results in the death of Anastasia, Dariat's first love, Dariat severs himself from the habitat personality and plots his revenge against his ancestor.

Deadnights

The name given to the group of people, mostly drawn from the young, who are enticed by Kiera Saltera's propaganda about the life of the possessed on Valisk.

Jezzibella

A performance diva obsessed with seeking out new experience, Jezzibella is trapped on New California by the military actions of Capone's Organization and soon joins the gangster as lover and adviser.

Ralph Hiltch

A low ranking officer in the Kulu empire, Hiltch is the officer in charge of the small Kulu embassy on Lalonde. After the fall of Lalonde and his successful capture of one of the



possessed, Hiltch is promoted to Commander and is acting as a consultant on possessed abilities for Princess Kirsten and the security forces on Ombrey.

Gerald Skibbow

Skibbow uproots his family from its poor but stable life in the New Brussels arcology on Earth for a chance to start over on the newly settled planet of Lalonde. During the outbreak of the possessed virus, his family is killed and Gerald is possessed. He is captured by Ralph Hiltch's commando unit, and placed in zero-tau for the journey to Ombrey.

Loren Skibbow

Gerald Skibbow's wife who is killed along with two of her daughters by Quinn Dexter.

Grant Kavanaugh

Louise and Genevieve's father is the master of the vast Cricklade estate. After taking the local militia to the nearby city of Boston to quell what is believed to be communist uprisings, Grant is possessed by Quinn Dexter's former possessor, who Dexter manages to force out of his body and into Grants.

Carmitha

Carmitha is a Romany, an ethnic group of gypsies that roam Norfolk's countryside.

Princess Kirsten

The ruler of the Kulu empire's planet Ombrey.

Dr. Riley Dobbs

The psychologist who studies Gerald Skibbow and attempts, through him, to understand the possessed phenomenon.

Neville Latham

Latham is the impotent sheriff of the town of Exnall.



Finnualla O'Meara

A young, defiant reporter trapped in a backwater town, Finnualla undermines the curfew in Exnall by making a priority announcement about a possible energy virus loose in the town.

Oenone

Oenone is a Syrinx's affinity-linked voidhawk.

Wing-Tsit

The founder of Edenism is a man of oriental descent whose personality still resides in the Edenist affinity pool.

Laton

A mass murderer and corrupter of Edenist ideas, Laton's family is killed and possessed in the initial outbreak of the energy virus on Lalonde. Laton's possessor takes him to the bitek habitat Pernik, but is forced out by Laton, who then sacrifices himself to scuttle the habitat and free the Edenist captain Syrinx.

Monica Foulkes

Foulkes is an intelligence operative who is assigned to watch Dr. Alkad Mzu during her imprisonment on Tranquility.

Samual

An Edenist intelligence operative who teams up with Monica Foulkes in the hunt for fugitive Dr. Alkad Mzu.

Hellhawks

Blackhawks that have been possessed by personalities of the dead.

Andre Duchamp

The Francophile captain of the Villeneuve's Revenge, Duchamp is a rogue who cares more about himself and his interest than he does about anything else.



Erick Thakrar

Thakrar is a naval intelligence operative working as a plant on the Villeneuve's Revenge.

Parker Higgins

Ione Saldana's chief scientist on the Laymil project.

The Laymil

An extinct race of non humanoid lifeforms with no known home world whose existence is evidenced only by an extensive series of orbital ruins around a gas giant in the same star system as Tranquility.

Cosmoniks

Genetically engineered warriors.

Beaulieu

A Cosmonik who joins Joshua Calvert's crew before he sets off in search of Dr. Alkad Mzu.

Moyo

A kindly possessor now living in the captive town of Exnall.

Stephanie Ash

Moyo's lover and would-be savior of the Exnall children.

Dr. Gilmore

A naval intelligence doctor who is leading the study of captured possessor Jacqueline Couteur.

King Alastair II

The ruling monarch of the Kulu empire.

Ikela

The former Garissan starship captain is a member of the conspiracy led by Dr. Alkad Mzu to exact revenge on the Omurtans for the genocide of the Garissan people.



Objects/Places

The Lady Mac

Joshua Calvert's spherical battle ship.

Lalonde

The source of the possessed outbreak is a newly colonized jungle world.

The Alchemist

A weapon of unknown, terrible destructive power invented by Dr. Alkad Mzu for use against the home world of the Garissan archenemy the Omurtas. The Alchemist is never used and its location and exact nature is known only to Mzu.

Omurta

The home world of the Omurtans, who commit a horrific act of genocide on the planet of Garissa.

Norfolk

Louise and Genevieve's home world is an agrarian world that takes its geographical names from ancient England.

Norwich

The capital city of Norfolk.

Bitek

A living constructed organic system.

Garissa

The barren home world of Dr. Alkad Mzu; it is now uninhabitable after the Omurtan genocide.



Valisk

Valisk is a bitek habitat founded by Edenist outsider Rubra.

The Dorados

A series of asteroids containing, in its population, a small group of Garrison loyalists.

Ombrey

One of the principle planets of the Kulu Empire, Ombrey is a modern planet of heavy commerce sporting a technologically advanced and largely wealthy society.

Aetherstone

The capital city of Ombrey is home to its ruler Princess Kirsten and her family.

Nanonics

Mechanical implants that allow humans to communicate and operate the electronics in their environment, the nanonics can also contain a vast amount of freely accessible information and can even be linked to their hosts' nervous systems to directly inform actions such as combat and vision coordination.

Montbridge

A peninsula on Ombrey that is ceded to the possessed as part of a truce arranged by Annette Ekelund, Ralph Hiltch and Princess Kirsten.

Exnall

One of the four towns on Montbridge, Exnall is the principle source of the possessed outbreak on the peninsula.

Cricklade

The Kavanaugh's expansive estate on Norfolk includes several small townships as well as the estate proper where the Kavanaugh's make their home.



New California

A modern industrial planet, New California is a prominent member of the Confederation.

San Angeles

The capital city of New California becomes the center of Capone's Organizational network.

Zero-tau

Zero-tau is a method of suspended animation used for long term space flight, or for preserving a damaged body for eventual repair. The possessed cannot stand zero-tau, and it invariably will force them out of the body subjected to it.

The Villeneuve's Revenge

Andre Duchamp's embattled battle ship.

The Far Realm

The Martian vessel that agrees to ferry Louise Kavanaugh, her sister Genevieve and Fletcher Christian away from the fallen world of Norfolk.

Kulu

The principle planet of the Kulu empire, Kulu is home to King Alastair II and is the most populated world in the Confederation.

The Tantu

The naval ship seized by Quinn Dexter in his flight from Norfolk.

The Dechal

A vessel whose crew maintains a deadly rivalry with that of the Villeneuve's revenge.

Guyana

An former asteroid, now moonlet orbiting Ombrey, Guyana is home to the psych facility where Dr. Dobbs is studying Gerald Skibbow.

The Deadnight Fleks

The name given to Kiera Saltera's propaganda advertisements about life on Valisk.

Swallow

A euphemism used to describe the method by which a voidhawk warps space to create a wormhole.



Themes

Edenism Versus Adamism

One of the principle divisions in humanity in Hamilton's saga is between the Edenists and the Adamists. The difference in the two philosophies is found in the meaning of their respective names. When Edenist founder Wing-Tsit discovered the affinity gene, he believed he was returning humanity to the state of openness and communion that existed in the Garden of Eden, before the fall of man. A society that is linked by affinity is not subject to the secrecy and lonely desperation of the individual human condition. There is no shame, because, like Adam and Eve before the fall, every individual in the link is naked to the others from birth. In addition, the Edenist practice of incorporating the identity of dying members into the affinity pool is seen by many Edenists as the promise of eternal life fulfilled and thus, again, a return to the immortality man enjoyed before the fall.

Adamists are only called so by Edenists, who do not understand how their fellow humans can tolerate the solitary existence of life without affinity. The Adamists are all alone, unable to fully share in the joy and sorrow of those around them. They are each, one man, which is the meaning of the word Adam. Adamists see the genetic manipulation needed to form affinity as an abomination and they do not consider the Edenist uplink upon death a form of immortality. This resistance to Edenist ideas even leads most of them to reject more minor forms of affinity, such as links with animals, or bonds with bitek habitats like Valisk and Tranquility. Valisk and Tranquility represent schisms in both groups of people. Valisk is formed by a rogue Edenist, who is not comfortable with the shared environment of the Edenist hive mind. Tranquility is formed by an Adamist who sees the advantages and beauty of affinity.

Life Beyond Death

A story involving the possession of the living by the dead must by definition raise questions about life after death. The returning souls describe their life after death as an unbearable, non-corporeal, void in which they are nevertheless crammed in together. The souls are not safe from each other, and dominant souls prey upon and torture weaker ones. In this description the void is much like the medieval vision of Hell, where the damned will be tortured not only by demons and the environment, but by other condemned souls. The possessed make contradictory statements about this void. At one point, it is described as a place where the damned have the ability to perceive the actions of the living, but cannot partake of the joys and sorrows created by those actions. Later, Loren Skibbow contradicts this vision by telling her husband that in the void she is consumed by worry for her living daughter Marie. It does seem clear that the souls trapped in this void are still subject to the pains of their former life. Stephanie Ash tells Moyo that she was raped and murdered in front of her children, and her anguish is still on the surface when she rages about this unjust end.



There are indications though, that this void of souls is not the only part of life after death. Loren Skibbow tells Gerald that if she had not been so concerned about Marie, she would have moved on. She cannot give Gerald details about this further destination, but her words seem to confirm the feelings of Father Horst, who, after his trials on Lalonde, is convinced that the possessed are either ignorant of, or not telling the whole truth about life beyond death.

The Edenist practice of affinity linking a dying person's personality to the affinity pool adds a third wrinkle to the interpretation of life after death. Many Edenists consider this to be life after death, or at least some form of immortality, but after the revelation of the possessed, many Edenists begin to wonder if the link can be said to actually preserve life. The possibility that someone who has been added to the affinity pool might really exist in the void of the possessed is part of the philosophical problem that Laton warns Edenists they will now be forced to face.

Revenge

Revenge is the primary motivating force behind the actions of several characters in the story, including Quinn Dexter, Erick Thakrar, and Dr. Alkad Mzu.

The early history of Quinn Dexter's life is something of mystery. What is clear is that the Earthborn Dexter became a Satanist at a young age and joined a society or cult whose ranks include a woman named Banneth. Dexter falls in love with the woman, but it is she who betrays him to the authorities and is responsible for his arrest and shipment to Lalonde as an Ivet. Although Dexter believes that his mission is to captain the army of the dead sent by his master, The Light Brother, Lucifer, his desire to return to Earth and exact revenge upon Banneth is not far behind.

Erick Thakrar is still troubled by the accidental death of a teenage crewmember of a trade ship attacked by the Villeneuve's Revenge. This guilt has been transformed into anger at the Villeneuve's Revenge's captain, Andre Duchamp, who ordered the raid. Though Thakrar is a naval officer and thus obliged to seek the arrest and punishment of Duchamp as part of his duty to the Confederation, his mission to bring down the Francophile captain has developed into a mission of revenge.

No one is as consumed by the desire for revenge as Dr. Alkad Mzu. The genocide committed by Omurta on Mzu's home world of Garissa has resulted in the near extinction of her people. Garissa is now uninhabitable and the few loyalists to the culture that remain are scattered about on isolated asteroid settlements. Mzu's desire for vengeance is so strong that it is able to endure a thirty year wait for the naval embargo on Omurta, and Mzu's own captivity on the bitek habitat Tranquility, to end.



Style

Point of View

Hamilton writes in the third person omniscient voice. He experiments with different levels of intimacy with his character point of view. A few times, when writing from the point of view of an unknown alien force, he abandons omniscience and writes of the Confederation and its many different people as though every aspect of them, down to their physical construction is foreign.

The point of view switches often, and Hamilton is not afraid to jump into the minds of multiple characters in the same scene. He plays some favorites of course, returning to the minds of principle characters like Joshua Calvert, Ione Saldana, Ralph Hiltch, Al Capone, and Erick Thakrar regularly.

Psychological exploration of the internal emotional states of the many characters is kept to a minimum, as Hamilton focuses on action to tell the story. Characters are, in general, reduced to clichés, and fall strongly into recognizable psychological "types."

The mechanics of how to portray the dual personality of the possessed person present some problems for the narration. Once a character becomes possessed, he or she may be referred to a few more times by his former name, but is eventually given over to the possessor. The thoughts and emotions of the possessed person are then only described as though witnessed by the possessor. The possessed personality is typically not given its own point of view. The two exceptions to this occur in the previous book, when both Laton, and Quinn Dexter used the will and force of their characters to overpower and force out their possessors.

Setting

The many settings in the book, from planets, to habitats, to ships, to asteroids, are separated from each other by political description, not physical description. The many environments, the pastoral agrarian fields of Norfolk, the Amazonian jungle of Lalonde, the rolling hills of the Tranquility Habitat, are only hinted in the short introductions to scene changes. Most of the scenery is implied, rather than explicitly stated. Hamilton spends much more time describing the political differences between the many environments, but as a large portion of the book is spend aboard ships and habitats that Hamilton expends little effort to differentiate, it is clear that the specifics of his settings have taken a backseat to the action of the story. The reader is given specific details about only two of the locations in the story.

Norfolk, Louise Kavanaugh's home, is a pastoral world of rolling hills and shallow seas. Its geographic attributes make it a perfect world in which to create an agrarian state. The planet produces the usual range of farm crops, but is principally know for the



Norfolk Tear, a rose, beautiful in its own right, that regularly weeps, drop by drop, a sweet nectar that is one of the most pricy drinks in the Confederation.

Tranquility, the domain of Ione Saldana, the Lord of Ruin, is a large bitek habitat, seeded some three hundred years prior, which is home to millions. Bitek habitats resemble giant, elongated capsules and are usually placed in orbit around gas giants, so that they can harvest energy from the electromagnetic fields so common around such planets. Tranquility is similar to a large city and contains skyscrapers, many of which house the corporate headquarters of some of the largest Confederation companies. However, the habitat also contains miles of park lands, featuring rolling hills, several freshwater lakes, and a series of artificial streams. Habitats contain their own internal organs, which process the waste produced by the communities on their surface, and produce a fresh atmosphere and even food from living, organic walls rising throughout the habitat.

Language and Meaning

The vocabulary used in the story is for the most part high school level. This being the third novel of a futuristic sci-fi saga, there are plenty of coined terms that pepper the writing including nanoics, swallow, bitek, cosmonik, voidhawk, and zero-tau. Hamilton does not experiment with sentence structure and rarely employs affected language. Some of the characters employ bits of foreign language (Andre Duchamp uses the occasional well-known French word or phrase) and vernacular particular to their original lifetime (possessed like Al Capone will employ phrases from the 1920s and Fletcher Christian adds words from King James English, thee, thou and whither to his speech). In general, this is kept to such a minimum that it cannot be considered as an attempt to accurately employ the speech patterns such people would use.

The only break from the normal prose occurs when characters communicate through affinity links. Hamilton sets these communiqués off by placing them in bold font and sometimes, though not always, he will employ the playwright's structure of dialogue where a character's name is written, followed by a colon, and then the statement.

Structure

It is difficult to describe the structure of the novel as anything but haphazard. Scenes run across chapter lines, chapters themselves can contain multiple scenes that seem to have nothing to do with each other. There are only a few points where the tension is allowed to build. For the most part, the story moves along from event to event. Action is the focus, but even here there is a scattering of intent and structure. Dynamic moments diffuse suddenly and seemingly arbitrarily. Hamilton sets up points of conflict that resolve to little or no effect.

The book contains sixteen chapters, but no other divisions. The chapters are not graced with names and there are no quotes, verse, or other asides in between chapters. This

volume is, in several publications, bound with its companion and thus this book can be looked upon as the first section of a larger volume.



Quotes

"You mean that's not your body?"

'No. This is a mortal man by the name of Eamon Goodwin, though I now wear my own form above his. I hear him crying inside me.' He fixed Carmitha with a steady eye. 'That is why the others pursue you. There are millions of souls lost in the torment of beyond. All seek living bodies so they may breathe again.'"

Chapter 1, p. 30.

"Quinn smiled at them. His calling was finally revealed. He would bring his divine gift of guidance to the lost armies which God's Brother had seeded throughout the Confederation. It would be a crusade, a glorious march of the dead, folding the wings of Night around every spark of life and hope, and extinguishing it for ever."

Chapter 2, p. 64.

"I'm sorry, Ralph, but as I said, you simply cannot threaten me. Have you worked out why yet? Have you worked out the real reason I will win? It is because you will ultimately join me. You are going to die, Ralph. Today. Tomorrow. A year from now. If you're lucky, in fifty years time. It doesn't matter when. It is entropy, it is fate, it is the way the universe works. Death, not love, conquers all in the end. And when you die, you will find yourself in the beyond. That is when you and I will become brother and sister in the same fellowship. United against the living. Coveting the living."

Chapter 4, pp. 164-165.

"You know,' she said, 'we haven't called one since Laton destroyed Jantrit. And now he's back. I suppose there is a certain inevitability about it.'

'He was back,' Ruben said. 'We really have seen the last of him now. It's funny, in a way I almost regret his suicide, however noble. I think we're going to need that kind of ruthlessness in the weeks ahead.'"

Chapter 5, p. 193.

"Open your goddamn eyes, shitheads! These people can fly among the stars for Christ's sake. They know everything there is to know about how energy works, they know all about quantum dimensions, hell they can even switch off time if they feel like it. And what they don't know, they can find out pretty fucking quick. They'll see what you've done, they'll follow where you take the planet. And they'll take it back.'"

Chapter 7, p. 247.

"Traitor,' Lawrence Dillon yelled. 'You are one of the blessed ones. God's Brother allowed you back into this world to fight the legions of the false Lord. Now you defy the messiah chosen to lead the returned.'

Quinn clicked his fingers, and Lawrence fell silent. 'I don't know who you are, friend. But don't fuck with me or you'll die to regret it.'

'I do not wish to draw swords with any man. So stand aside and we will go our separate ways.'"

Chapter 8, p. 279.



"Al's jocularly darkened. 'You'd better fucking believe it, buddy. We're back, and we're here to stay. Grab that? What I'm trying to convince you guys is that we ain't no end of the world threat, it's not us who's the riders of the Apocalypse. We've proved possessed and non-possessed can live together on this planet. Okay, so people out there are alarmed right now, that's only natural. But we're frightened too, you can't expect us to go back to the beyond. We've got to work together on this. I'm personally offering the Assembly President my hand in friendship. Now that's an offer he can't refuse.'" Chapter 10, p. 339.

"'Admittedly Laton was in a hurry and under a great deal of stress,' Lalwani said. 'But if we understand him correctly, once the red cloud envelops a world completely, the possessed can take it right out of the universe.'" Chapter 10, p. 359.

"'Look, we have got to bring home to people what possession is really all about, the meaning behind the act,' Kelly said. 'So far all the majority of Confederation citizens have had is this poxy official warning from the Assembly. It's an abstract, a problem on another planet. People have to learn it's not that simple, that there's more to this disaster than simple physical security. We have to deal with the philosophical issues as well.'" Chapter 11, pp. 393-394.

"'Yeah. It is pretty deep when you think about it.' 'That's your considered in-depth analysis of the situation is it?' For a moment she thought she'd gone and wounded him. But he just gave a gaunt smile. Not angry. 'Yeah,' he said, quiet and serious. 'It's deep. I had three bloody narrow escapes inside two days on that Lalonde mission. If I'd made one mistake, lone, just one, I'd be dead now. Only I wouldn't, as we now know, I'd be trapped in the beyond. And if Shaun Wallace was telling the truth—and I suspect he was—then I'd be screaming silently to be let back in no matter what the cost or who had to pay it.'" Chapter 11, p. 398.

"Alkad and the rest of the crew fell silent as they accessed the report. More than surprise, more than disbelief, she felt anger. Anger that this should happen now. Anger at the threat it posed to her mission, her life's duty. Mother Mary must have deserted the Garissan people long ago, leaving the universe to place so much heartbreak and malicious catastrophe in their path." Chapter 13, p. 456.

"'Yes, Your Majesty. It has to be done. We have to prove to ourselves, and every other planet in the Confederation, that the possessed can be driven back into the beyond. I expect such a war might well take decades; and who would ever agree to start it if they didn't know victory was possible? Whatever the outcome, we have to try.'" Chapter 14, p. 492.

"'They slaughtered ninety-five million of us, Ikela, they wrecked our planet, they made us breathe radioactive soot until our lungs bled. Genocide doesn't even being to



describe what was done to us. You and I and the other survivors were a mistake, an oversight. There's no life left for us in this universe. We have only one purpose, one duty. Revenge, vengeance, and justice, our three guiding stars."
Chapter 15, p. 548.

"So how could you leave?"

'I wouldn't leave it...' She fluttered her hands in exasperation as she struggled with the concept. 'I just wouldn't be in the same part of it as the rest of them.'

'You said there were no different parts.'

'There aren't.'

'So how—'

'I don't pretend to understand, Gerald. But you can leave the others behind. The beyond isn't necessarily the torment everyone is making it out to be.'

Chapter 15, p. 559.



Topics for Discussion

Contrast the spirit of Edenism with that of Adamism. Does the Edenist invention of affinity seem like a perversion of humanity or a positive extension of it?

Explain the various attitudes toward life after death theorized by the story. Cite examples.

Discuss how the principle of revenge drives the actions of various characters. Does this emotion serve to cloud or sharpen the judgment of the characters involved? Does it do both?

Discuss Joshua Calvert's promiscuity with other aspects of his character. Is it possible for a good person to be incapable of fidelity?

Describe the life of the voidhawk and its captain, from birth to death. What advantages does this close affinity link have? What disadvantages?

Contrast the lives and works of Ione Saldana, Laton, and Rubra, three outsiders to accepted society.

Highlight some of the examples of the possessed aiding the living. Do these acts of redemption make up for the usurpation of the body used to perform them?

In many characters, social taboo has engendered bigotry. Cite examples of this from the story.

Discuss the transformation of Father Horst. How do the events on Lalonde strengthen his faith?

Kiera Saltera uses propaganda videos to lure Deadnight followers to Valisk for possession. Discuss propaganda and its ability to cause people to act against their own best interests. Cite some examples from real life.