

**Brian Herbert & Kevin J. Anderson**

**A WHISPER OF  
CALADAN SEAS**

**DUNE CHRONICLES—SHORT STORIES**  
**VOLUME 1**

*Arrakis, in the year 10,191 of the Imperial calendar.*

*Arrakis... forever known as Dune...*

The cave in the massive Shield Wall was dark and dry, sealed by an avalanche. The air tasted like rock dust. The surviving Atreides soldiers huddled in blackness to conserve energy, letting their glow-globe powerpacks recycle.

Outside, the Harkonnen shelling hammered against the bolt-hole where they had fled for safety. Artillery? What a surprise to be attacked by such seemingly obsolete technology... and yet, it was effective. *Damned effective.*

In pockets of silence that lasted only seconds, the young recruit Elto Vitt lay in pain listening to the wheezing of wounded, terrified men. The stale, oppressive air weighed heavily on him, increasing the broken-glass agony in his lungs. He tasted blood in his mouth, an unwelcome moisture in the absolute dryness.

His uncle, Sergeant Hoh Vitt, had not honestly told him how severe his injuries were, emphasizing Elto's "youthful resilience and stamina." Elto suspected he must be dying, and he wasn't alone in that predicament. These last soldiers were all dying, if not from their injuries, then from hunger or thirst.

Thirst.

A man's voice cut the darkness, a gunner named Deegan. "I wonder if Duke Leto got away. I hope he's safe."

A reassuring grunt. "Thufir Hawat would slit his own throat before he'd let the Baron touch our Duke, or young Paul." It was the signalman Scovich, fiddling with the flexible hip cages that held two captive distrans bats, creatures whose nervous systems could carry message imprints.

"Bloody Harkonnens!" Then Deegan's sigh became a sob. "I wish we were back home on Caladan."

Supply sergeant Vitt was no more than a disembodied voice in the darkness, comfortingly close to his injured young nephew. "Do *you* hear a whisper of Caladan seas, Elto? Do you hear the waves, the tides?"

The boy concentrated hard. Indeed, the relentless artillery shelling sounded like the booming of breakers against the glistening black rocks below the cliff-perch of Castle Caladan.

"Maybe," he said. But he didn't, not really. The similarity was only slight, and his uncle, a Master Jongleur... a storyteller extraordinaire... wasn't up to his capabilities, though here he couldn't have asked for a more attentive au-

dience. Instead the sergeant seemed stunned by events, and uncharacteristically quiet, not his usual gregarious self.

Elto remembered running barefoot along the beaches on Caladan, the Atreides home planet far, far from this barren repository of dunes, sandworms, and precious spice. As a child, he had tiptoed in the foamy residue of waves, avoiding the tiny pincers of crabfish so numerous that he could net enough for a fine meal in only a few minutes.

Those memories were much more vivid than what had just happened...

\* \* \*

The alarms had rung in the middle of the night, ironically during the first deep sleep Elto Vitt had managed in the Atreides barracks at Arrakeen. Only a month earlier, he and other recruits had been assigned to this desolate planet, saying their farewells to lush Caladan. Duke Leto Atreides had received the governorship of Arrakis, the only known source of the spice melange, as a boon from the Padishah Emperor Shaddam IV.

To many of the loyal Atreides soldiers, it had seemed a great financial coup—they had known nothing of politics... or of danger. Apparently Duke Leto had not been aware of the peril here either, because he'd brought along his concubine Lady Jessica and their fifteen-year-old son, Paul.

When the warning bells shrieked, Elto snapped awake and rolled from his bunk bed. His uncle, Hoh Vitt, already in full sergeant's regalia, shouted for everyone to hurry, *hurry!* The Atreides house guard grabbed their uniforms, kits, and weapons. Elto recalled allowing himself a groan, annoyed at another apparent drill... and yet hoping it was only that.

The burly, disfigured weapons master Gurney Halleck burst into the barracks, his voice booming commands. He was flushed with anger, and the beet-colored inkvine scar stood out like a lightning bolt on his face. "House shields are down! We're vulnerable!" Security teams had supposedly rooted out all the booby traps, spy eyes, and assassination devices left behind by the hated Harkonnen predecessors. Now the lumpish Halleck became a frenzy of barked orders.

Explosions sounded outside, shaking the barracks and rattling armor-plaz windows. Enemy assault 'thopters swooped in over the Shield Wall, probably coming from a Harkonnen base in the city of Carthag.

“Prepare your weapons!” Halleck bellowed. The buzzing of lasguns played across the stone walls of Arrakeen, incinerating buildings. Orange eruptions shattered plaz windows, decapitated observation towers. “We must defend House Atreides.”

“For the Duke!” Uncle Hoh cried.

Elto yanked on the sleeve of his black uniform, tugging the trim into place, adjusting the red Atreides hawk crest and red cap of the corps. Everyone else had already jammed feet into boots, slapped charge packs into lasgun rifles. Elto scrambled to catch up, his mind awlirl. His uncle had pulled strings to get him assigned here as part of the elite corps. The other men were lean and whipcord strong, the finest hand-picked Atreides troops. He didn’t *belong* with them.

Young Elto had been excited to leave Caladan for Arrakis, so far away. He had never ridden on a Guild Heighliner before, had never been close to a mutated Navigator who could fold space with his mind. Before leaving his ocean home, Elto had spent only a few months watching the men train, eating with them, sleeping in the barracks, listening to their colorful, bawdy tales of great battles past and duties performed in the service of the Atreides dukes.

Elto had never felt in danger on Caladan, but after only a short time on Arrakis, all the men had grown grim and uneasy. There had been unsettling rumors and suspicious events. Earlier that night, as the troops had bunked down, they’d been agitated but unwilling to speak of it, either because of their commander’s sharp orders or because the soldiers didn’t know enough details. Or maybe they were just giving Elto, the untried and unproven new comrade, a cold shoulder...

Because of the circumstances of his recruitment, a few men of the elite corps hadn’t taken to Elto. Instead, they’d openly grumbled about his amateur skills, wondering why Duke Leto had permitted such a novice to join them. A signalman and communications specialist named Forrie Scovich, pretending to be friendly, had filled the boy with false information as an ill-conceived joke. Uncle Hoh had put a stop to that, for with his Jongleur’s talent for the quick, whispered story—always told without witnesses because of the ancient prohibition—he could have given any of the men terrible nightmares for weeks... and they all knew it.

The men in the Atreides elite corps feared and respected their supply sergeant, but even the most accommodating of them gave his nephew no preferential treatment. Anyone could see that Elto Vitt was not one of them, not one of their rough-and-tumble, hard-fighting breed...

By the time the Atreides house guard rushed out of the barracks, they were naked to aerial attack because of the lack of house shields. The men knew the vulnerability couldn't possibly be from a mere equipment failure, not after what they'd been hearing, what they'd been feeling. How could Duke Leto Atreides, with all of his proven abilities, have permitted this to happen?

Enraged, Gurney Halleck grumbled loudly, "Aye, we have a traitor in our midst."

Illuminated in floodlights, Harkonnen troops in blue uniforms swarmed over the compound. More enemy transports disgorged assault teams.

Elto held his lasgun rifle, trying to remember the drills and training sessions. Someday, if he survived, his uncle would compose a vivid story about this battle, conjuring up images of smoke, sounds, and fires, as well as Atreides valor and loyalty to the Duke.

Atreides soldiers raced through the streets, dodging explosions, fighting hard to defend. Lasguns sliced vivid blue arcs across the night. The elite corps joined the fray, howling—but Elto could already see they were vastly outnumbered by this massive surprise assault. Without shields, Arrakeen had already been struck a mortal blow.

\* \* \*

Elto blinked his eyes in the cave, saw light. A flicker of hope dissipated as he realized it was only a recharged glowglobe floating in the air over his head. Not daylight.

Still trapped in their tomb of rock, the Atreides soldiers listened to the continued thuds of artillery. Dust and debris trickled from the shuddering ceiling. Elto tried to keep his spirits high, but knew House Atreides must have fallen by now.

His uncle sat nearby, staring into space. A long red scratch jagged across one cheek.

During brief inspection drills while settling in, Elto had met Gurney Halleck and the other important men in Duke Leto's security staff, especially the renowned Swordmaster Duncan Idaho and the old Mentat assassin Thufir Hawat. The black-haired Duke inspired such loyalty in his men, exuded such supreme confidence, that Elto had never imagined this mighty man could fall.

One of the security experts had been trapped here with the rest of the detachment. Now Scovich confronted him, his voice gruff and challenging. "How

did the house shields get shut off? It must have been a traitor, someone you overlooked.” The distrans bats seemed agitated in their cages at Scovich’s waist.

“We spared no effort checking the palace,” the man said, more tired than defensive. “There were dozens of traps, mechanical and human. When the hunter-seeker almost killed Master Paul, Thufir Hawat offered his resignation, but the Duke refused to accept it.”

“Well, you didn’t find all the traps,” Scovich groused, probing for an excuse to fight. “You were supposed to keep the Harkonnens out.”

Sergeant Hoh Vitt stepped between the two men before they could come to blows. “We can’t afford to be at each other’s throats. We need to work together to get out of this.”

But Elto saw on the faces of the men that they all knew otherwise: they would never escape this death trap.

The unit’s muscular battlefield engineer, Avram Fultz, paced about in the faint light, using a jury-rigged instrument to measure the thickness of rock and dirt around them. “Three meters of solid stone.” He turned toward the fallen boulders that had covered the cave entrance. “Down to two and a half here, but it’s dangerously unstable.”

“If we went out the front, we’d run headlong into Harkonnen shelling anyway,” the gunner Deegan said. His voice trembled with tension, like a too-tight baliset string about to break.

Uncle Hoh activated a second glowglobe, which floated in the air behind him as he went to a bend in the tunnel. “If I remember the arrangement of the tunnels, on the other side of this wall there’s a supply cache. Food, medical supplies... water.”

Fultz ran his scanner over the thick stone. Elto, unable to move on his makeshift bed and fuzzed with painkillers, stared at the process, realizing how much it reminded him of Caladan fishermen using depth sounders in the reef fishing grounds.

“You picked a good, secure spot for those supplies, Sergeant,” Fultz said. “Four meters of solid rock. The cave-ins have cut us off.”

Deegan, his voice edged with hysteria, groaned. “That food and water might as well be in the Imperial Palace on Kaitain. This place... Arrakis... isn’t right for us Atreides!”

The gunner was right, Elto thought. Atreides soldiers were tough, but like fish out of water in this hostile environment.

“I was never comfortable here,” Deegan wailed.

“So who asked you to be *comfortable*?” Fultz snapped, setting aside his apparatus. “You’re a soldier, not a pampered prince.”

Deegan’s raw emotions turned his words into a rant. “I wish the Duke had never accepted Shaddam’s offer to come here. He must have known it was a trap! We can never live in a place like this!” He stood up, making exaggerated, scarecrowlike gestures.

“We need water, the ocean,” Elto said, overcoming pain to lift his voice. “Does anybody else remember *rain*?”

“I do,” Deegan said, his voice a pitiful whine.

Elto thought of his first view of the sweeping wastelands of open desert beyond the Shield Wall. His initial impression had been nostalgic, already homesick. The undulating panorama of sand dunes had been so similar to the even patterns of waves on the sea... but without any drop of water.

Issuing a strange cry, Deegan rushed to the nearest wall and clawed at the stone, kicking and trying to dig his way out with bare hands. He tore his nails and pounded with his fists, leaving bloody patterns on the unforgiving rock, until two of the other soldiers dragged him away and wrestled him to the ground. One man, a hand-to-hand combat specialist who had trained at the famous Swordmaster School on Ginaz, ripped open one of their remaining medpaks and dosed Deegan with a strong sedative.

The pounding artillery continued. *Won’t they ever stop?* He felt an odd, pain-wracked sensation that he might be sealed in this hellhole for eternity, trapped in a blip of time from which there was no escape. Then he heard his uncle’s voice...

Kneeling beside the claustrophobic gunner, Uncle Hoh leaned close, whispering, “Listen. Let me tell you a story.” It was a private tale intended only for Deegan’s ears, though the intensity in the Jongleur’s voice seemed to shimmer in the thick air. Elto caught a few words about a sleeping princess, a hidden and magical city, a lost hero from the Butlerian Jihad who would slumber in oblivion until he rose again to save the Imperium. By the time Hoh Vitt completed his tale, Deegan had fallen into a stupor.

Elto suspected what his uncle had done, that he had disregarded the ancient prohibition against using the forbidden powers of planet Jongleur, ancestral home of the Vitt family. In the low light their gazes met, and Uncle Hoh’s eyes were bright and fearful. As he’d been conditioned to do since childhood, Elto tried not to think about it, for he too was a Vitt.

Instead, he visualized the events that had occurred only hours before...

\* \* \*

On the streets of Arrakeen, some of the Harkonnen soldiers had been fighting in an odd manner. The Atreides elite corps had shouldered lasguns to lay down suppressing fire. The buzzing weapons had filled the air with crackling power, contrasted with much more primal noises of screams and the percussive explosions of old-fashioned artillery fire.

The battle-scarred weapons master ran at the vanguard, bellowing in a strong voice that was rich and accustomed to command. “Watch yourselves—and don’t underestimate them.” Halleck lowered his voice, growling; Elto wouldn’t have heard the words if he hadn’t been running close to the commander. “They’re in formations like Sardaukar.”

Elto shuddered at the thought of the Emperor’s crack terror troops, said to be invincible. *Have the Harkonnens learned Sardaukar methods?* It was confusing.

Sergeant Hoh Vitt grabbed his nephew’s shoulder and turned him to join another running detachment. Everyone seemed more astonished by the unexpected and primitive mortar bombardment than by the strafing attacks of the assault ’thopters.

“Why would they use artillery, Uncle?” Elto shouted. He still hadn’t fired a single shot from his lasgun. “Those weapons haven’t been used effectively for centuries.” Though the young recruit might not be well practiced in battle maneuvers, he had at least read his military history.

“Harkonnen devils,” Hoh Vitt said. “Always scheming, always coming up with some trick. Damn them!”

One entire wing of the Arrakeen palace glowed orange, consumed by inner flames. Elto hoped the Atreides family had gotten away... Duke Leto, Lady Jessica, young Paul. He could still see their faces, their proud but not unkind manners; he could still hear their voices.

As the street battle continued, blue-uniformed Harkonnen invaders ran across an intersection, and Halleck’s men roared in challenge. Impulsively, Elto fired his own weapon at the massed enemies, and the air shimmered with a crisscross web of blue-white lines. He fumbled, firing the lasgun again.

Scovich snapped at him. “Point that damn thing away from me! You’re supposed to hit *Harkonnens!*” Without a word, Uncle Hoh grasped Elto’s rifle, placed the young man’s hands in proper positions, reset the calibration, then slapped him on the back. Elto fired again, and hit a blue-uniformed invader.

Agonized cries of injured men throbbed around him, mingled with frantic calls of medics and squad leaders. Above it all, the weapons master yelled orders and curses through twisted lips. Gurney Halleck already looked defeated, as if he had personally betrayed his Duke. He had escaped from a Harkonnen slave pit years before, had lived with smugglers on Salusa Secundus, and had sworn revenge on his enemies. Now, though, the troubadour warrior could not salvage the situation.

Under attack, Halleck waved his hands to command the entire detachment. “Sergeant Vitt, take men into the Shield Wall tunnels and guard our supply storehouses. Secure defensive positions and lay down a suppressing fire to take out those artillery weapons.”

Never doubting that his orders would be obeyed, Halleck turned to the remainder of his elite corps, reassessing the strategic situation. Elto saw that the weapons master had picked his best fighters to remain with him. In his heart, Elto had known at that moment, as he did now thinking back on it, that if this were ever to be told as one of his uncle’s vivid stories, the tale would be cast as a tragedy.

In the heat of battle, Sergeant Hoh Vitt had shouted for them to trot double-time up the cliffside road. His detachment had taken their weapons and left the walls of Arrakeen. Glowlamps and portable illuminators showed firefly chains of other civilian evacuees trying to find safety in the mountainous barrier.

Panting, refusing to slacken their pace, they had gained altitude, and Elto looked down on the burning garrison city. The Harkonnens wanted the desert planet back, and they wanted to eradicate House Atreides. The blood-feud between the two noble families dated all the way back to the Butlerian Jihad.

Sergeant Vitt reached a camouflaged opening and entered his code to allow them access. Down below, the gunfire continued. An assault ’thopter swooped along the side of the mountain, sketching black streaks of slagged rock; Scovich, Fultz, and Deegan opened fire, but the ’thopter retreated—after marking their position.

As the rest of the detachment raced inside the caves, Elto took a moment at the threshold to note the nearest artillery weapons. He saw five of the huge, old-style guns pounding indiscriminately at Arrakeen—the Harkonnens didn’t care how much damage they caused. Then two of the mighty barrels rotated to face the Shield Wall. Flames belched out, followed by far-off thunder, and explosive shells rained down upon the cave openings.

“Get inside!” Sergeant Vitt shouted. The others moved to obey, but Elto remained fixated. In a single stroke, a long line of fleeing civilians vanished from the cliffside paths, as if a cosmic artist with a giant paintbrush had decided to erase his work. The artillery guns continued to fire and fire, and soon centered on the position of the soldiers.

The range of Elto’s full-power lasgun was at least as long as the conventional shells. He aimed and fired, pulsing out an unbroken stream but expecting little in the way of results. However, the dissipating heat struck the old-fashioned explosives in the loaded artillery shells, and the ragged detonation ripped out the breech of the mammoth cannon.

He turned around, grinning, trying to shout his triumph to his uncle—then a shell from the second massive gun struck squarely above the entrance to the cave. The explosion knocked Elto farther into the tunnel as tons of rock showered down, striking him. The avalanche sent shock waves through an entire section of the Shield Wall. The contingent was sealed inside...

\* \* \*

After days in the tomblike cave, one of the glowglobes gave out and could not be recharged; the remaining two managed only a flickering light in the main room. Elto lay wounded, tended by the junior medic and his dwindling supplies of medicinals. Elto’s pain had dulled from that of broken glass to a cold, cold blackness that seemed easier to endure... but how he longed for a sip of water!

Uncle Hoh shared his concern, but was unable to do anything else.

Squatting on the stone floor off to his left, two sullen soldiers had used their fingertips to trace a grid in the dust; with light and dark stones they played a makeshift game of Go, a carryover from ancient Terra.

Everyone waited and waited—not for rescue, but for the serenity of death, for escape.

The shelling outside had finally stopped. Elto knew with a sick certainty that the Atreides had lost. Gurney Halleck and his elite corps would be dead by now, the Duke and his family either killed or captured; none of the loyal Atreides soldiers dared to hope that Leto or Paul or Jessica had escaped.

The signalman Scovich paced the perimeter, peering into darkened cracks and crumbling walls. Finally, after carefully imprinting a distress message into the voice patterns of his captive distrans bats, he released them. The small creatures circled the dusty enclosure, seeking a way out. Their high-pitched cries

echoed from the porous stone as they searched for any tiny niche. After frantic flapping and swooping, at last the pair disappeared through a fissure in the ceiling.

“We’ll see if this works,” Scovich said. His voice held little optimism.

In a weak but valiant voice, Elto called his uncle nearer. Using most of his remaining strength, he propped himself on an elbow. “Tell me a story, about the good times we had on our fishing trips.”

Hoh Vitt’s eyes brightened, but for only a second before fear set in. He spoke slowly. “On Caladan... Yes, the old days.”

“Not so long ago, Uncle.”

“Oh, but it seems like it.”

“You’re right,” Elto said. He and Hoh Vitt had taken a coracle along the shore, past the lush pundi rice paddies and out into open water, beyond the seaweed colonies. They had spent days anchored in the foamy breakwaters of dark coral reefs, where they dove for shells, using small knives to pry free the flammable nodules called coral gems. In those magical waters they caught fan-fish—one of the great delicacies of the Imperium—and ate them raw.

“Caladan...” the gunner Deegan said groggily, as he emerged from his stupor. “Remember how vast the ocean was? It seemed to cover the whole world.”

Hoh Vitt had always been so good at telling stories, supernaturally good. He could make the most outrageous things real for his listeners. Friends or family made a game of throwing an idea at Hoh, and he would make up a story using it. Blood mixed with melange... a great Heighliner race across uncharted fold-space... the wrist-wrestling championship of the universe between two dwarf sisters who were the finalists... a talking slig.

“No, no more stories, Elto,” the sergeant said in a fearful voice. “Rest now.”

“You’re a Master Jongleur, aren’t you? You always said so.”

“I don’t talk about that much.” Hoh Vitt turned away.

His ancestral family had once been proud members of an ancient school of storytelling on the planet Jongleur. Men and women from that world used to be the primary troubadours of the Imperium; they traveled between royal houses, telling stories and singing songs to entertain the great families. But House Jongleur fell into disgrace when a number of the itinerant storytellers were proven to be double agents in inter-House feuds, and no one trusted them any longer. When the nobles dropped their services, House Jongleur forfeited its status in

the Landsraad, losing its fortunes. Guild Heighliners stopped going to their planet; the buildings and infrastructure, once highly advanced, fell into disrepair. Largely due to the Jongleur's demise, many entertainment innovations were developed, including holo projections, film-books, and shigawire recorders.

"Now is the time, Uncle. Take me back to Caladan. I don't want to be here."

"I can't do that, boy," he responded in a sad voice. "We're all stuck here."

"Make me *think* I'm there, like only you can do. I don't want to die in this hellish place."

With a piercing squeak, the two distrans bats returned. Confused and frustrated, they fluttered around the chamber while Scovioh tried to recapture them. Even they had been unable to escape...

Though the trapped men had held out little hope, the failure of the bats still made them groan in dismay. Uncle Hoh looked at them, then down to Elto as his expression hardened into grim determination.

"Quiet! All of you." He knelt beside his injured nephew. Hoh's eyes became glazed with tears... or something more. "The boy needs to hear what I have to say."

\* \* \*

Elto lay back, letting his eyes fall half-closed as he readied himself for the words that would paint memory pictures on the insides of his eyelids. Sergeant Vitt sat rigid, taking deep breaths to compose himself, to center his uncanny skill and stoke the fires of imagination. To tell the type of story these men needed, a Master Jongleur must calm himself; he moved his hands and fingers in the ancient way, going through the motions he'd been taught by generations of storytellers, ritualistic preparations to make the story good and pure.

Fultz and Scovich shifted uneasily, and then moved closer, anxious to listen as well. Hoh Vitt looked at them with glazed eyes, barely seeing them, but his voice carried a gruff warning. "There is danger."

"Danger?" Fultz laughed and raised his grimy hands to the dim ceiling and surrounding rock walls. "Tell us something we don't know."

"Very well." Hoh was deeply saddened, wishing he hadn't pulled strings to get Elto assigned to the prestigious corps. The young man still thought of himself as an outsider, but ironically—by staying in the line of fire and destroy-

ing one of the artillery weapons—he had shown more courage than any of the proven soldiers.

Now Hoh Vitt felt a tremendous sense of impending loss. This wonderful young man, filled not only with his own hopes and dreams but also with those of his parents and uncle, was going to die without ever achieving his bright promise. He looked around, at the faces of the other soldiers, and seeing how they looked at him with such anticipation and admiration, he felt a moment of pride.

In the hinterlands of Jongleur, a hilly rural region where Hoh Vitt had grown up, dwelled a special type of storyteller. Even the natives suspected these “Master Jongleurs” of sorcery and dangerous ways. They could spin stories like deadly Spiderwebs, and in order to protect their secrets, they allowed themselves to be shunned, hiding behind a cloak of mystique.

“Hurry, Uncle,” Elto said, his voice quiet and thready.

With intensity in his words, Sergeant Vitt leaned closer. “You remember how my stories always start, don’t you?” He touched the young man’s pulse.

“You warn us not to believe too deeply, to always remember that it’s only a story... or it could be dangerous. We could lose our minds.”

“I’m saying that again to you, boy.” He scanned the close-pressed faces around him. “And to everyone listening.”

Scovich made a scoffing noise, but the others remained silent and intent. Perhaps they thought his warning was only part of the storytelling process, part of an illusion a Master Jongleur needed to create.

After a moment’s hush, Hoh employed the enhanced memorization techniques of the Jongleurs, a method of transferring large amounts of information and retaining it for future generations. In this manner he brought to mind the planet Caladan, summoning it in every intricate detail.

“I used to have a wingboat,” he said with a gentle smile, and then he began to describe sailing on the seas of Caladan. He used his voice like a paintbrush, selecting words carefully, like pigments precisely mixed by an artist. He spoke to Elto, but his story spread hypnotically, wrapping around the circle of listeners like the wispy smoke of a fire.

“You and your father went with me on week-long fishing trips. Oh, those days! Up at sunrise and casting nets until sunset, with the golden tone of the sun framing each day. I must say we enjoyed our time alone on the water even more than the fish we caught. The companionship, the adventures and hilarious mishaps.”

And hidden in his words were subliminal signals: *Smell the salt water, the iodine of drying seaweed... Hear the whisper of waves, the splash of a distant fish too large to bring aboard whole.*

“At night, when we sat at anchor alone in the middle of the seaweed islands, we’d stay up late, the three of us, playing a fast game of tri-chess on a board made of flatpearls and abalone shells. The pieces themselves were carved from the translucent ivory tusks of South Caladan walruses. Do you remember?”

“Yes, Uncle. I remember.”

All the men murmured their agreement; the Jongleur’s haunting words were as real to them as to the young man who had actually experienced the memories.

*Listen to the hypnotic, throbbing songs of unseen murmons hiding in a fog bank that ripples across the calm waters.*

The shroud of pain grew fuzzy around Elto, and he could feel himself going to that other place and time, being carried away from this hellish place. The parched, dusty air at first smelled dank, then cool and moist. As he closed his eyes, he could sense the loving touch of Caladan breezes on his cheek. He smelled the mists of his native world, spring rain on his face, sea waves lapping at his feet as he stood on the rocky beach below the Atreides castle.

“When you were young, you would splash in the water, laughing and swimming naked with your friends. Do you remember?”

“I...” And Elto felt his voice merge with the others, becoming one with them. “We remember,” the men mumbled reverently. All around them the air had grown close and stifling, most of the oxygen used up.

Another one of the glowglobes died. But the men didn’t know this. They were anesthetized from their pain.

*See the wingboat cruising like a razorfin under dazzling sunlight, then through a warm squall under cloudy skies.*

“I used to body surf in the waves,” Elto said with a faint smile of wonder.

Fultz coughed, then added his own reminiscences. “I spent a summer on a small farm overlooking the sea, where we harvested paradan melons. Have you ever had one fresh out of the water? Sweetest fruit in the universe.”

Even Deegan, still somewhat dazed, leaned forward. “I saw an elecra once, late at night and far away—oh, they’re rare, but they do exist. It’s more than just a sailor’s story. Looked like an electrical storm on the water, but alive. Luckily, the monster never came close.” Though the gunner had been hysterical

not long before, his words held such an awed solemnity that no one thought to disbelieve him.

*Swim through the water; feel its caress on your body. Imagine being totally wet, immersed in the sea. The waves surround you, holding and protecting you like a mother's arms...*

The two distrans bats, still loose from the signalman's cages, had clung to the ceiling for hours, but now they swayed and dropped to the floor. All the air was disappearing in their tomb.

Elto remembered the old days in Cala City, the stories his uncle used to tell to an entranced audience of his family. At several points in each of those tales, Uncle Hoh would force himself to break away. He had always taken great care to remind his listeners that it was *only a story*.

This time, however, Hoh Vitt took no breaks.

Realizing this, Elto felt a moment of fear, like a dreamer unable to awaken from a nightmare. But then he allowed himself to succumb. Though he could barely breathe, he forced himself to say, "I'm going into the water... I'm diving... I'm going deeper..."

Then all the trapped soldiers could hear the waves, smell the water, and remember the whisper of Caladan seas... The whisper became a roar.

\* \* \*

In the velvet shadows of a crisp night on Dune, Fremen scavengers dropped over the ridge of the Shield Wall into the rubble. Stillsuits softened their silhouettes, allowing them to vanish like beetles into crevices.

Below, most of the fires in Arrakeen had been put out, but the damage remained untended. The new Harkonnen rulers had returned to their traditional seat of government in Carthag; they would leave the scarred Atreides city as a blackened wound for a few months... as a reminder to the people.

The feud between House Atreides and House Harkonnen meant nothing to the Fremen—the noble families were all unwelcome interlopers on their sacred desert planet, which the Fremen had claimed as their own thousands of years earlier, after the Wandering. For millennia these people had carried the wisdom of their ancestors, including an ancient Terran saying about each cloud having a silver lining. The Fremen would use the bloodshed of these royal houses to their own advantage: the deathstills back at the sietch would drink deeply from the casualties of war.

Harkonnen patrols swept the area, but the soldiers cared little for the bands of furtive Fremen, pursuing and killing them only out of sport rather than in a focused program of genocide. The Harkonnens paid no heed to the Atrides trapped in the Shield Wall either, thinking none of them could have survived; so they left the bodies trapped in the rubble.

From the Fremen perspective, the Harkonnens did not value their resources.

Working together, using bare callused hands and metal digging tools, the scavengers began their excavation, opening a narrow tunnel between the rocks. Only a few dim glowglobes hovered close to the diggers, providing faint light.

Through soundings and careful observations on the night of the attack, the Fremen knew where the victims would be. They had uncovered a dozen already, as well as a precious cache of supplies, but now they were after something much more valuable, the tomb of an entire detachment of Atrides soldiers. The desert men toiled for hours, sweating into the absorbent layers of their stillsuits, taking only a few sipped drops of recovered moisture. Many water rings would be earned for the moisture recovered from these corpses, making these Fremen scavengers wealthy.

When they broke into the cave enclosure, though, they stepped into a clammy stone coffin filled with the redolence of death. Some of the Fremen cried out or muttered superstitious prayers to Shai-Hulud, but others probed forward, increasing the light from the glowglobes now that they were out of sight of the nighttime patrols.

The Atrides soldiers all lay dead together, as if struck down in a strange suicide ceremony. One man sat in the center of their group, and when the Fremen leader moved him, his body fell to one side and a gush of water spewed out of his mouth. The Fremen tasted it. Salt water.

The scavengers backed away, even more frightened now.

Carefully, two young men inspected the bodies, finding that the uniforms of the Atrides were warm and wet, stinking of mildew and damp rot. Their dead eyes were open wide and staring, but with contentment instead of the expected horror, as if they had shared a religious experience. All of the dead Atrides soldiers had clammy skin... and something even more peculiar, revealed when the Fremen cut them open.

The lungs of these dead men were entirely filled with water.

The Fremmen fled, leaving their spoils behind, and resealed the cave. Thereafter, it became a forbidden place of legend, drawing wonder from anyone hearing the story as it was passed on by Fremmen from generation to generation.

Somehow, sealed inside a lightless cave in the driest desert, all of the Atreides soldiers had *drowned*...