

# Perry Rhodan

LEMURIA 3

A dynamic space battle scene set against a deep blue, star-filled background. In the center, a large, dark, cylindrical starship is being targeted by several smaller, sleek fighters. Bright red and orange energy beams emanate from the central ship, while other ships fire blue and white laser beams. The scene is filled with motion, suggesting a high-stakes conflict. The overall aesthetic is that of a classic science fiction pulp magazine cover.

ANDREAS  
BRANDHORST

EXODUS  
TO THE STARS

A NOVEL

# **#3 Exodus to the Stars**

by Andreas Brandhorst

Perry Rhodan has discovered a huge space ship, an ark in space, carrying a population of humans who set out on their journey 55,000 years ago, from Earth - Lemurians, the legendary forefathers of mankind.

A virus, prepared by the creator of the arks long ago, sends Perry Rhodan into a coma and takes him on a mental journey 55,000 years into the past. Rhodan finds out there are more arks than he has known about - he becomes a witness to the birth of the arks of the stars...

**Perry Rhodan**

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# **Exodus to the Stars**

by Andreas Brandhorst

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Pabel-Moewig Verlag KG, Rastatt

# 1

## *Jorgal*

The machines no longer sang in this cold, dark place. If they did anything at all they only whispered and moaned. Jorgal thought that was very sad. *They are dying, just as we are dying*, he thought sorrowfully. *Their death is our death.*

"Did you hear that?" asked Tanira from the darkness that surrounded Jorgal. Her voice trembled with worry.

There was a cracking in the darkness, a metallic groaning that had become unpleasantly familiar to Jorgal since it disturbed the machines' last melodies.

"Structural instability," replied Darhel, who knew about such things and could make connections that always astounded Jorgal. Often Jorgal wondered how so much complex knowledge could find room in a single head. "We're here in the outer region of the wreck section, in a sector where the Collision caused more damage than in the inner areas."

"We should have stayed inside," the ever-fearful Hilaila moaned softly.

"Everything is dead inside," Jorgal said, surrounded by blackness. "The song of the machines has gone silent for good in there."

"I feel sorry for you," said Memerek, who knew how much the song meant to Jorgal, who was often called the Machine Whisperer. Without those melodies, he all but choked on the feeling of loneliness even though he knew the entire Group was nearby. Or what was left of it, anyway. Some of them had died along the way.

"I feel sorry for all of us," Jorgal replied in a low voice.

"I have memorized the floor plans precisely," Darhel said. "It can't be far now to the capsule compartment."

*How long have we been on the way?* Jorgal wondered, feeling weariness bear down like a heavy weight on his mind and body. It had always been difficult for him to get an exact impression of the amount of elapsed time. Even his own age was a quantity with only a vague meaning. He often felt young, younger than the others, often old, even ancient, especially when he had to go without the song of the machines for an extended period.

The cracking sound repeated itself, louder and more threatening. Jorgal heard a faint whimpering from a little further away than the other voices, then soothing words that came from Tanira. She had assumed the task of taking care of the youngest in the Group.

"Jorgal?" Darhel asked.

"The machines here are whispering so faintly that I can hardly hear anything. Perhaps they can sing again further ahead."

"Memerek? Do you see anything?"

Jorgal knew that Memerek could see warmth. Or more precisely: she saw temperature differences. It struck him as strange, and he had often wondered how eyes could see that which was revealed only to his sense of touch. But he knew that such questions were pointless. There were many strange things about the children of the Group; that was why they *belonged* to the Group.

"Yes," he heard Memerek's voice say. "The hatch is not far now. But something has burst on the left side in front of it. Sharp-edged pieces of debris hang over the path."

"Can we avoid them?" asked Darhel, who had taken over the leadership of the Group since Anhalo's death in the devastated room with the plants.

"There's a gap on the right that we can climb through," Memerek replied. "I'll help you."

Jorgal heard a clicking as Darhel tried to turn on his lamp. The light he hoped for did not appear. The lamp had stopped singing long before.

A hand touched his arm and pulled gently. "Come," Memerek said. "We are the first. I'll show you the way."

Jorgal dragged his third, currently useless leg behind him as he followed Memerek. She was now humming softly in order to help the others orient themselves. He ducked his head when she told him to, going along with the others, and soon they reached the end of the corridor. There was a wall there, and in it a door with closed seals.

While Memerek helped the others pass by the obstacle without coming up against the sharp edges, Jorgal concentrated on the door. A faint, very faint voice sang within it, and its melody was not nearly as lovely and invigorating as those he had heard and enjoyed before the Collision. But when he reached his third leg out to it, he could establish a connection, and as he did so, he remembered one of Darhel's pieces of advice. Before opening a door, one must determine whether there was still air on the other side. Without air, Darhel had emphasized, one could no longer breathe, and when one could no longer breathe, one died. How strange. There were so many things that could make one die, but only a few that gave life.

Jorgal listened past the singing and heard an echo that indicated the presence of air. He had learned one thing by now: no echo meant emptiness.

There was a hiss as Jorgal loosened the seals with the low song, and then he only had to pull on the lever to open the door. Light fell on him, not nearly as bright as it was in the rooms before the Collision, but bright enough for his eyes to see again.

A dead body floated two meters in front of him, as though held in the air by invisible hands. The lack of a melody told Jorgal that there was no longer any gravity on the other side of the door. *That* was why the corpse did not fall to the floor.

Darhel paused next to Jorgal. "One of the Normals," he said when he saw the body.

It was not the first time that he had used the term, but it still surprised Jorgal since the word meant that he himself, the Machine Whisperer, was not normal. And that seemed to him as strange as certain other things, since he felt normal and had never felt any differently. *That is because you know nothing else*, was Darhel's explanation, but that did not really explain anything at all because how *could* he know anything else? After all, he had always been Jorgal since his birth, always connected to the song of the machines.

"There is no force-that-pulls-down in there," Jorgal said. He found this description much more apt, but he still added the technical term that Darhel used. "No gravity."

Darhel nodded, his head seemingly about to come loose from his body. His head sat like a large globe on a thin neck reinforced by flexible support rods, and it seemed very heavy. Perhaps it was because so much knowledge was inside. How much did intelligence weigh?

"The capsule is over there," Darhel said, sounding very relieved. "So I wasn't wrong after all."

Jorgal looked in the indicated direction and on the opposite side of the room he saw a silver sphere with nozzle-like extensions in several places. *Jets*, he knew. *Maneuvering jets*. And *inside* the sphere waited a sleeping song.

"The Normals used that for maintenance of the outer areas of the Ship," Darhel added. "The capsule can take us away from here."

Jorgal looked to the right, to the wide window—from there came the light that allowed his eyes to see. It came not only from the stars and a distant, coldly shining sun, but also from a glowing object in space. Jorgal thought he understood.

"You're right, Darhel," he said. "There are other fragments. But they're ... burning?"

Darhel looked towards the window as well and a shadow seemed to flit across his face. Jorgal thought he could see

sadness and despondency, then confidence quickly pushed both aside. "We have to leave in any case. We can't stay here. The structural instability is increasing all the time. It's only a question of time until this section of the Ship breaks apart." Darhel gestured to the capsule. "Can you reach it and make it ready for use?"

"I feel the song within it," the Machine Whisperer replied. "It's asleep but I can awaken it."

"Then let's not waste any time. I'll help the others."

Jorgal pushed against the wall with all three legs and flew towards the capsule. He passed closely by the Normal, seeing his empty face gone slack in death. The dull, sightless eyes, then the gaping wound in the back of his head, the blood further down, a cloud of red drops that reached to the wall, up to a large splotch on a sharply edged surface. When the Collision happened, the back of the man's head must have struck the edge. How many faces Death had ...

Jorgal reached the capsule and, weightless, held on to one of the jets, and then looked back. Darhel and the Seer Memerek—slender, supple Memerek with big emerald-green eyes that could also see in darkness, with soft, downy skin and jointless, flexible fingers—helped the others: Tanira, Hilaila, Tortek, Mindahon, and the Youngest Ones, a chirping band of seven Group children who had not completed their amorphous stage and kept changing their shape. Fourteen out of nineteen who had fled after the Collision had—nearly—brought the world to an end. Five of them had died along the way because they had not been careful and paid attention or because the Sickness had made them weak at just the wrong moment.

That was what the Normals called what had made Jorgal a Machine Whisperer, Memerek a Seer, and the others what they were: Sickness. But Jorgal did not feel sick, just tired, and besides, he remembered the discussion that Darhel had had with a Normal shortly before the Collision. They had

been talking about the attempt to bring the Sickness under control with genetic manipulation, and that the intervention of genetic engineering had made everything even worse.

Jorgal was not an expert in such things, nor did they especially interest him. His interest was primarily in the songs that the machines sang for him. When he heard their melodies, he was transported into a realm of contentment in which everything else—even the things that often happened to his body—no longer mattered. But since the Collision the machines sang less and less, and more faintly. As a result he felt increasingly lonely. Besides, he lacked the *strength* of the songs.

It was a simple matter for him to open the capsule's hatch, and as he slid inside, he saw that there was enough room for them all if they pressed together a little. He felt over the central control console with his third leg until he touched the low standby melody, made contact with it, and then gently awakened the main melody.

The capsule *sang* for him.

Light shone in its interior, and the displays on the central console lit up. The humming and whirring of the capsule's systems joined in with the song of the machine and, for a while, Jorgal lost himself in it without paying attention to anything else. The feeling of loneliness only partly faded away because this was a tiny machine in relation to the great machine that the ship had been before the Collision. Filled with melancholy, he listened to the song that reminded him of a great, beautiful symphony that had given his spirit wings and filled him with joy. At least the quiet song lent him new strength and it was pleasant to lose the feeling of weakness.

"Jorgal?"

He turned without taking his third leg from the central console. Darhel appeared in the hatchway and helped Memerek, Tanira, and the others into the capsule. Jorgal heard not only the chirping of the Youngest Ones but also

something else: a cracking and groaning that came from the innermost reaches of the fragment. It was the dissonant melody of destruction and death.

"Hurry, hurry!" he urged and pointed to the places within. "On the floor. No, don't hold on to the walls. When the down-pulling force returns, you'll fall and perhaps hurt yourselves. Hurry, hurry!"

"Jorgal ... " Darhel began once more, after he had pushed Hilaila into the capsule, slid inside, and closed the hatch after him. "Can you take us outside and ... steer?"

Jorgal gave a start. "I thought you ... "

Darhel shook the large, heavy head in which there was so much knowledge. "I could absorb the contents from the data storage unit, but it would take too long to sort through the information, process it, and *understand* it. If you become part of the navigation song ... "

Jorgal knew what he meant. Before, when the Ship was still whole, he had often played at becoming part of this or that machine. He had been happiest when he managed an especially deep merger, when he became a tone in the machine's own song.

Something moved.

"Hang on!" Jorgal exclaimed and reached for the central console with both hands.

Something broke outside the maintenance capsule, and along with it could be heard a loud hissing that rapidly faded away. The capsule started moving, and through the window Jorgal saw that it was approaching a gash that had appeared in the outer hull and through which the air was escaping. Metal struck metal and for a moment Jorgal feared that the capsule had been damaged. But he heard the song as before, unchanged.

Darhel and the others looked at him.

"All right, I'll try," Jorgal said and closed his eyes. He tried to imagine beginning a game, opening himself completely to the melody, comparing its sequences of notes with each

other, and watching for the structure that allowed him to add himself to the song as an additional note. He let himself be carried and embraced by the resonances and tickled in a pleasant manner by the vibrations. He rested in the short pauses that separated the individual parts of the melody from each other and gave them their depth. This was his world; he belonged *here*, in the world of the song of the machines. Here there was nothing he had to fear. Here shelter and protection awaited him. Why had the Normals never understood this? Why had they broken off the connection when he had once almost succeeded in merging completely with the Ship's symphony?

Jorgal let the vibrations of the note sequences show him the way. He explored their numerous variations, and suddenly he *knew* which notes he needed to change in order to open a hatch with a radio signal, to activate the steering jets, and to guide the capsule outside.

Something touched him on his third leg and he opened his eyes without breaking the connection. Images were superimposed on each other. One of them showed him Darhel at his side and next to him Memerek, the gentle gaze of her large eyes—almost as beautiful as the song of the machines—turned towards him.

"There." Darhel pointed through the window to something that stood out from the stars like a shadow. "Take us there. It's another fragment of the Ship, larger than the one we just left. And the sensors show that its environmental systems are functioning. Perhaps we'll find safety there."

Jorgal hoped for more than that. He hoped he would soon be hearing machines singing in full chorus, loud and strong.

## 2

### *Roder Roderich*

Two large starships trailed behind the four crawlers. Both ships were spherical, though one had an equatorial rim while the other was flattened at the poles: the PALENQUE and the LAS-TOOR. On the displays and screens in front of Roder Roderich, they shrank along with the planet on which the largest part of the star ark LEMCHA OVIR had crashed.

"Crawler I to PALENQUE," Catchpole's voice said from the hypercom speaker. "Confirming full operational readiness."

The two other crawlers also reported, then Roderich called in. "Crawler IV here, Grandma. Everything is operating perfectly for us, too."

"If you call me 'Grandma' again, Junior, I'll wring your neck." The image on the display changed and showed the commander of the PALENQUE, Sharita Coho, who was more than seventy years old. Her dark, almond-shaped eyes flashed as she gave him a feigned angry look and pointed her finger threateningly at him.

"It'd be easier for you to try that on my long-necked companions," Roderich replied and grinned. "Catch you later, Grandma!" He switched off the transmission channel.

Something chirped behind him.

"You forgot to turn on the Translator again, Yu'Ili," Roderich said.

There was a slight click, then an impressive bass voice could be heard. "Someday it will be too much for her and then she will make her threat a reality. And my name is not Yu'Ili, but Yu'Ihan-Nyulzen-Y'sch-Takan-Nyuel."

Roderich raised his eyebrows in surprise, then turned and looked at the Blue. "You did that on purpose."

"What?"

"Programmed the Translator to speak in such a deep voice. It almost sounds like it came from a grave."

"I feel quite alive. In contrast to you when Sharita finally really does blow her top, as you so quaintly put it."

Yu'lhan sat two meters behind the pilot at the complex controls of the scanning systems, with his back to Roderich. He did not need to turn around, of course, since his disc-shaped head, almost half a meter in diameter and only about ten centimeters thick, had two ellipsoid eyes at the back.

A second Blue came out of the tiny laboratory area at the stern of Crawler IV, ducking through a doorway that was too low for him. Tru'lhan-Nyulzen-Y'sch-Takan-Nyuel, called Tru'lli by Roderich, was two meters and twelve centimeters tall, exceeding his brother by exactly ten centimeters. There was yet another difference: a yellow spot over the front right eye. Apart from that, they seemed to Roderich as identical as two peas in a pod.

He smiled as something occurred to him. "Has anyone ever called you 'the Blues Brothers?'" he asked.

"I suspect that is some sort of humorous reference," Yu'lhan said in his deep, sepulchral voice.

"We do not understand why you always attempt to be humorous," Tru'lhan said, his Translator set to a normal vocal range. He was inclined to speak for his brother as well.

"Because life is so serious, you'd have to break down crying if there wasn't something to laugh about now and then," Roderich replied. His smile grew wider as he looked at the Blues. Yu'lli and Tru'lli were among his best friends, not just among the prospectors of the PALENQUE, but overall, and no matter what others may have claimed, Blues *did* have expressions. Of course, they were very subtle, but Roderich thought he could make out the half-hidden hints. No matter how serious and solemn Yu'lli and Tru'lli pretended to be, they also enjoyed the little verbal duels. "I

often have the feeling that only Catchpole understands me. He doesn't have such a narrow viewpoint."

"It is true that humans have only two eyes," Yu'lhan said, "but it is still a mystery to me how you can see things 'narrowly.'"

"Say, Yu'lli, what are you—a Maahk disguised as a Blue? We should test your breath for traces of methane."

"I merely wished to point out that there is a lack of precision in some of the expressions you use," Yu'lhan replied in a voice that could hardly be any deeper. "Somewhat more rationality would not be bad for you."

Roderich gave the controls a quick glance although it was not actually necessary—the on-board Syntron guided the crawler more reliably than any pilot. That was especially so since they and Pearl Laneaux had upgraded the crawlers to be even more self-reliant and independent.

"Too much rationality is like too much salt in the soup of life," he lectured. "It spoils the taste. I assume that I was touched by your Creature of Humor while I was still in the cradle."

"There is no Creature of Humor," Yu'lhan said.

"But there is the Creature of Thoughtlessness and Stupidity," Tru'lhan added.

"I am neither thoughtless nor stupid," Roderich insisted defensively. "If your Creature came looking for me, he was barking up the wrong tree or whatever Creatures do." He pointed past the taller of the Blues to the aft area. "Is everything in order back there, Tru'lli?"

"This can hardly be a matter of analyzing mineral samples and such. And we are certainly not a hospital ship. This mission does not seem to me very reasonable."

"I know what you mean. If we find ark survivors in the asteroid belt, we can't very well give them medical help, that's true. But we will be quite capable of informing the PALENQUE and the Akonians on the LAS-TOOR as well."

"If we find survivors, Roder, you will no longer be laughing," Yu'lhan said, and this time Roderich shuddered because the voice *really* did sound as though it came from the grave. This was how he would have imagined the voice of Death to sound if it spoke to him. "Because the Creature of Chaos will be with them in all its many forms."

"Yu'lli?"

"My name is not ... "

"Yeah, yeah, I know. Please change the adjustment on your Translator. You could give someone the cold shivers the way you have it now."

"Four?" The voice of Crest Julian Catchpole spoke from the hypercom speaker. He had assumed leadership of the four-crawler mission team.

"Still here," Roderich said.

"We'll reach the asteroid belt in ten minutes. Fan out as planned."

"Roger, Grandpa. Number Four will proceed to its assigned search area."

"Four, I ought to talk to Sharita about you, Roderich. You seem to lack respect for your elders."

"Two against one. Is that fair?"

Catchpole's face appeared briefly on the screen: his head was bald, his skin browned and wrinkled. In his eyes was a gleam that revealed a man that was comfortable and at peace with the world. "Who ever said the universe was always fair, my *boy*? Keep a careful lookout, Four. There could be pieces of wreckage with survivors on board in front of us."

"Understood, Julian. We'll keep an eye out."

"And don't drive Yu'lhan and Tru'lhan crazy. Catch you later. Over and out."

The two Blues retreated to the rear section of the crawler and there readied the instruments that would normally serve to locate ores, minerals, and other raw materials from which valuable resources could be obtained. This time, they

were to be used to find pieces of debris from a star ark and among them, perhaps human beings. Lemurians to be exact, the descendants of emigrants who, some 560 years of their subjective time before, had left Lemur—the Earth—on board spaceships that traveled at nearly the speed of light. A time-dilated journey into the future. For the Lemurians, six centuries had passed, but outside their ships it had been almost fifty-six millennia. Roderich was still astonished when he thought about it. Almost 56,000 years! Here, one could *touch* the past.

Yu'lhan and Tru'lhan worked in the aft laboratory and spoke to each other in Gatasian—to Roderich's ears, it sounded like loud chirping. He was alone for a few seconds, perhaps even for a few minutes, and a hidden observer would have noticed the change in his face. A mask seemed to loosen revealing another face beneath. Another Roderich, much more serious and melancholy than the always laughing and joking young man that the PALENQUE'S other prospectors knew. *This* Roderich seemed to be years older than the one he showed his friends and co-workers. The face was more hollow-cheeked, the eyes duller. At some point this Roderich had seen something that had terrified him. So much so that he hid himself behind a manner of behavior that could have been considered superficial. It was a shield he used to protect a wounded, vulnerable self.

Yu'lhan came back from the rearmost part of the crawler. "The instruments are ready," he said, and turned to the scanner's controls. His Translator-provided voice no longer sounded like it came from a tomb, but from a woman who wanted to seduce someone.

Roderich turned his head and smiled. "Much better!"

"Is it not an effort for you to always be turning your head when you wish to see to the side or behind you?" Yu'lhan asked. "You could have artificial eyes implanted in the back of your head."

"I don't want to have to look at you *all* the time, Yu'lli, thank you *very* much."

Roderich bent over the controls as an audio signal reminded him that a change in heading was necessary. "Here we go, boys." The stars in the bow window slid to the side as he changed the course. "We've reached the edge of our search sector. Tru'lli?"

"Scanning in progress."

Roderich touched control fields and a holographic field formed in front of the bow window that gave the impression someone had turned on hidden spotlights here and there out in space. Pockmarked rocks emerged from vague shadows, many asteroids not even as large as the crawler, others with a diameter of several hundred kilometers. The crawler's force field was in operation and protected it from the smaller rocks. The Syntron avoided the larger ones with timely course deviations that were immediately integrated into the search pattern. Roderich listened for a while to the routine reports that the hypercom transmitted and added some of his own. His glance alternating between readouts and the bow window. Columns of data streamed through the edge of the holo field, reporting on the composition and structure of various asteroids.

"A mining operation here would be quite worthwhile," Tru'llhan's voice said from the rear. "In particular, a station of inexpensive prefabricated components, the usual infrastructure of antigrav modules, compensators, and maintenance units, as well as automatic processing systems. A small group could produce a great deal. There is certainly no lack of raw materials."

"I doubt if we'll be here long enough even to *begin* construction of such a station," Roderich said, looking out into space. "Ever since Perry Rhodan came on board, Sharita Coho seems to have forgotten that the PALENQUE is supposed to make money. If things go on like this, the GEMC brass won't exactly give us a round of applause."

"Perhaps she wants to sell the historical information that we obtained from the star arks' data storage units," Yu'lhan suggested. "Our shares ... "

"Energy signatures," Tru'lhan interrupted his brother.

They immediately appeared in the holo field in front of the forward window: colored bars whose colors and lengths showed the type and quantity of the energy emissions that had been registered.

"Plasma fires on two wreck sections," said Tru'lhan, who was doing the analysis. "Additional fluctuations indicate chemical reactions of varying intensity."

The zoom enlarged the view of the debris, and Roderich saw shattered components that had once been part of the star ark LEMCHA OVIR. They looked as though a titan's fist had grabbed them, shaken them, and then hurled them away. Cable strands streamed like torn sinews in space, and burst windows stared like dead eyes in the cold darkness. A silent dance was taking place out there, choreographed by a catastrophe; a collision that had released enormous kinetic energy and torn the ark apart. Asteroids and wreck sections spun on the stage of this bizarre ballet, each object endowed with its own momentum that took it away from the others or brought it closer to them. As Roderich watched, a piece of debris struck one of the smaller asteroids and burst apart like a seed pod that had been waiting to release its contents. The impact had caused an explosive decompression. At least a part of the fragment had still had atmosphere, and lost it explosively in the vacuum of space, taking everything along with it, small debris and ...

"Roder ... " Tru'lhan chirped.

"Yes, I saw them." Two humanoid figures that the zoom had shown with the same pitiless indifference as everything else. Two Lemurians, descendants of those who had set out 50,000 years before in objective time. Dead.

"They are both here," Yu'lhan said, and the female voice of the Translator was a strange contrast to the words. "The

many-shaped Creature of Chaos and the black Creature of Death."

Roderich's fingers darted across the controls as he called up the current scanning data and correlated it. "Are there wreck sections with functioning life-support systems?"

Most of the colored bars disappeared from the holo field. Two remained, and after a few seconds only one was left.

"Another energy signature," Tru'lhan said. "And it's approaching the wreck section with the still functioning life-support systems."

A sphere appeared in the holo field and Roderich saw maneuvering jets firing to make course corrections. "Survivors!"

"Everything indicates that," Yu'lhan confirmed.

Roderich activated the hypercom unit. "Number Four has found something, Julian. We haven't found just wreck sections but survivors as well. My intention is to ... "

"Attention," the synthetic voice of the on-board Syntron suddenly said, and Roderich saw the green glow of the High-Energy Overload field flare up around the crawler. "Invasive energy interference."

"Yu'lli? Tru'lli?"

"Scan running." This time, Yu'lhan did not complain about the nickname. "Strong emissions near one of the asteroids. It does *not* originate from the wreck sections of the Lemurian star ark."

"Menttia?"

By that, Roderich meant the energy beings that came from the fifth planet of the Ichest system. Until just a few days before they had behaved as though they were hostile to humans.

"Negative."

The HO screen flickered, and Crawler IV began to tremble like a frightened animal.

"We have problems, Julian," Roderich said loudly. "Somebody or something is trying to take control of us."

"The hyper-communication connection no longer exists," the Syntron's voice informed him.

Once more the holographic field's depiction changed and a large asteroid appeared, almost thirteen hundred kilometers long and more than eight hundred wide. Numerous craters showed on the gray-black surface.

"The invasive interference is coming from there?"

"Yes," Yu'lhan confirmed tersely.

"But there's ... *nothing* there."

"Not on it, but *in* it." Yu'lhan stepped next to the pilot's seat, reached out a hand that had four main fingers and three thumbs, and operated several control fields. A configuration diagram appeared with the same external structure as the asteroid. In its interior Roderich saw several areas that resembled buildings.

"A ... base inside the asteroid?"

"No doubt."

"It's getting much too hot for me here," Roderich said and activated the main engines. That is, he *wanted* to activate them, but the expected rumbling was not forthcoming. A dull ache started in his neck, spreading from there through his back and head, apparently with the intention of scraping every single nerve. The HO screen flickered once more, then vanished like a blown-out candle flame. The crawler shook more violently and its outer hull creaked.

The pain grew so intense that Roderich screamed loudly. Darkness enveloped him, as black as space, and as he fell through that blackness, he heard the shrill chirping of the two Blues as though from a distant world that had expelled him and left him to face the Creature of Chaos.

### 3

## *Perry Rhodan*

To Perry Rhodan, the technical section of the PALENQUE was a labyrinth in which things hummed, chirped, and clicked everywhere. Most of the machinery seemed to be permanent installations, but there were also devices that appeared improvised: new arrangements of positronic components that resembled exotic spider webs; holo fields that had been connected to modified hypersensors and in which tiny discharges flickered repeatedly; projectors between which multi-colored force fields surged like curtains blowing in the wind. Rhodan saw all that as he went by, accompanied by Sharita Coho, the PALENQUE's commander. She was once more wearing a dark, military-like uniform, in its belt-holster was a hand-beamer from which she never seemed to be parted. But his attention was on something else: a strange whispering that seemed audible only to him.

"Still not hearing anything?" he asked Sharita.

She arched a dark brow. "It's pretty loud in here."

"You know what I mean."

"Kurd?" Sharita called.

"We're over here," came a voice from somewhere in the maze. It seemed more than a little chaotic to Rhodan, but Sharita apparently saw order and structure within it since she knew exactly where she had to turn to find the source of the voice. Rhodan followed her through several narrow aisles and finally reached an open area where two men were working on a highly complex installation: Kurd Brodbeck, Chief Engineer of the PALENQUE, and Huang Lee, one of his co-workers. They glanced up just briefly, then went back to their work.

"To whom or what do I owe the honor?" Brodbeck asked.

"Our guest on board, no less." Sharita smiled fleetingly. "No, Perry, I'm still not hearing anything. Are you sure you didn't just imagine it?"

"Very sure. Meanwhile, the whispering has turned into a low whistling. It's getting louder. And it's coming from here."

"Kurd?"

"Are you certain it's not a phantom noise?" the Chief Engineer asked as he checked over the shining bands of some hyperenergetic connections with a hand-held sensor unit. "Sometimes there's a ringing in your ear even though you're not really hearing anything."

Rhodan listened within himself. For nearly three hours, he had perceived the sound, which was not actually a sound at all. Often it whispered like the voice of the wind in distant treetops, and at other times it sounded like an angry insect that now flew past his right ear, then his left. At the moment it sounded like an alarm siren howling at a distance of several kilometers.

Something drew his attention to several dark objects in the web of hyperenergetic strands that were connected to a mobile Syntron. The overlaid projection field showed columns of data flowing here and there along with complicated patterns that were repeatedly removed and replaced with new ones. Huang Lee raised his hand and touched a holographic control field. Another hyperstrand in the network lit up and probed across the objects like a thin finger of light.

"What are those?" Rhodan asked, pointing to the dark objects: small disks with diameters of a few centimeters.

Brodbeck straightened up. The Chief Engineer was middle-aged, thin and sinewy, and had water-blue eyes and a burn scar on his right cheek. "Those are submodules from the LEMCHA OVIR's data storage unit. We've been trying for several hours to access the information contained inside them."

"It's amazing how different this technology is from that which the Lemurians used in the NETHACK ACHTON," the stocky Huang Lee said. "The two star arks don't just come from two different time periods. During the five hundred years of subjective time that passed on board, their technology also continued to evolve in different directions."

Brodbeck nodded. "This memory module is made of a different material, and the type of data storage is different, too. To say nothing of the formatting." He gestured to the arrangement of hyperenergy strands and the mobile Syntron. "This is a special scanner. We're scanning the data structure on a quantum-mechanical level, but without looking inside the box that has Schrödinger's Cat in it." Rhodan understood what the Chief Technician meant. The scanning procedure did not have any effect on the structure of the data. Schrödinger's cat stayed both dead *and* alive. Or to put it another way: the information in the memory modules remained intact.

Rhodan's eyebrows raised slightly. "When did you begin your examination?"

"A few hours ago."

"When, precisely?"

Brodbeck glanced at a chronometer. "Just three hours ago."

Rhodan looked at Sharita Coho. "And it was just three hours ago I heard the whispering for the first time." A sudden weakness surged up within him and he swayed on his feet.

"Is everything all right?" Sharita asked, concerned.

"I ... think so," Rhodan replied. Strange: some of the weakness remained within him despite the Cell Activator that continuously renewed his physical strength. He took a deep breath. "There must be a connection."

"Or it might be nothing more than a coincidence," Sharita said, looking intently at Rhodan.

He pointed to the LEMCHA OVIR's data storage unit. "Whatever I'm feeling is coming from there."

He was very certain, although he did not have a rational explanation for it. Emotional certainty connected the "sound" with the data storage modules taken from the star ark that had crashed on the planet Mentack Nutai.

Lee again touched some holographic control fields and the network of hyperstrands rotated. An audible signal sounded, a slight *ping*, and the shrinking and swelling geometrical patterns in the three-dimensional projection field grew into a unified, stable form.

"I think we're ready," Lee said. "We should now be able to read the first data."

Brodbeck looked questioningly first at Sharita Coho and then at Rhodan as well.

"I'm just as curious as you are," Rhodan said.

"All right." Brodbeck nodded to Huang. "Let's try it with the first module."

Lee's fingers glided across the holographic controls and the glowing hyperweb started moving once more. Like a hand with dozens of colored fingers, it felt for the first data storage module and the information that the Lemurians had entered into it over the course of six centuries of dilated time—the oldest data was objectively 56,000 years old.

Rhodan's hands flew to his temples as a sudden pain stabbed through him—someone seemed to be trying to drive a dagger into his brain. But after a second or two, the hot pain changed to a strange mental itching, as though a feather stroked every single thought and every single feeling. He scratched his head out of pure reflex.

"Perry?" Sharita asked. She still stood next to him, but her voice had grown faint, as though it came from a distance. Other sounds forced their way into the background, sounds that did not originate in the technical section of the PALENQUE.

Rhodan wanted to reply, but was unable to open his mouth or to move his tongue and lips. A terrible thought struck him—*Is my Cell Activator defective?*—but it immediately faded away and lost itself in the gray mist of a forgetfulness that overwhelmed the here and now. He was aware of sinking to the floor, but that did not matter. It was part of a world that remained around him as he fell through a stream of images that seemed completely strange and at the same time strangely familiar. Images whose details he at first did not understand and yet became *solid*. Something pulled his thoughts like rubber bands, and as they were torn apart, something else took their place.

Sharita Coho looked down at Perry Rhodan. He lay on a diagnostic couch in the PALENQUE's med-station, connected to a medical Syntron that monitored his biofunctions. The ship's physician, Dr. Hyman Mahal, had just examined him.

"How is he doing, Doctor?"

"Pulse and respiration have stabilized," Dr. Mahal said. "The same for his metabolic functions. He's ... sleeping."

"That doesn't look like normal sleep to me. What about his Cell Activator?"

"Everything's all right as far as I can determine."

"But you aren't entirely sure?"

"I've never had an Activator-carrier as one of my patients, Sharita."

The commander noticed Rhodan's eyes moving beneath his closed lids. The rest of his body remained completely motionless, but his eyes showed hectic activity.

Sharita gestured to him. "What does that mean?"

"He's dreaming."

Sharita turned to Brodbeck. "Have the data storage modules been disconnected from the scanner?"

"Yes, but there's still a mental connection between him and the data storage unit."

"Hmmm ... " Sharita considered whether she should get in touch with Terra and request help. After all, this concerned the Terran Resident. "Is his condition life-threatening?"

"No," Mahal replied, pointing to the readouts on the diagnostic couch. "As I said, his condition is stable. If it goes on much longer, Rhodan will have to be artificially nourished, but his life is definitely not threatened."

Sharita thought of the precarious balance with Jere von Baloy and the Akonians of the LAS-TOOR that continued despite the dangers that had been overcome in the previous few days. How would they react if they received hypercom signals that came from the PALENQUE and were being transmitted to the Earth? Wouldn't they feel something was going on behind their backs, and suspect the Terrans were requesting reinforcement?

"We'll wait for the time being," Sharita finally decided, looking once more at the rigid face with hyperactive eyes beneath their closed lids. "Perhaps he'll wake up on his own."

She raised her head when a voice sounded from the intercom loudspeaker. "Sharita?"

"I hear you, Alemaheyu."

"There's a new arrival in the Ichest System. He just made contact with us."

"Who is it?"

"Icho Tolot."

## 4

### *Icho Tolot*

The spherical black starship dropped back into normal space two light-minutes above the target system's ecliptic. At its controls sat a monster with a peaceful heart. He was three and a half meters tall and his shoulders were two and a half meters wide. He had four arms and black hair, and three red eyes glowed in his hemispherical head.

Icho Tolot immediately began scanning the area of space surrounding his ship to acquire an impression of the current situation. A biopositronic interface connected him with his ship's scanners and sensors. The incoming hyperdetector data was not only received by the on-board Syntron, but also by the Halutian's overbrain, which immediately processed and evaluated the information.

Something had led Perry Rhodan to call him here to this remote star system with an urgent message. Icho Tolot was frustrated that he did not know any of the details, but it was undoubtedly an important matter and he considered it best to be prepared for anything. Immediately upon reentering the normal space-time continuum, his spacecraft enveloped itself in a Paratron shield, and the Syntron held the Paratron projectors ready along with the ship's guns. If it came to an attack, Icho Tolot was well-protected, and within a few seconds he could defend himself in a highly effective manner.

But Perry Rhodan had not spoken of an imminent danger in his brief message, so the Halutian was not surprised when there was no attack. Icho Tolot looked at the readings on the instruments, and his regular brain took in the first results of the data analyses performed by the overbrain. There was a large red sun with eleven planets, three of them—numbers four through six—in the ecosphere, and an

extended asteroid belt between the seventh and eighth planets.

Two starships were in the vicinity of the fifth planet. Configuration and energy patterns enabled an immediate identification: one ship was Terran, the other Akonian. There was no apparent hostility between them.

Did Perry Rhodan's hypercom call have something to do with the Akonians?

Ichō Tolot's overbrain concerned itself with that question while it continued to absorb scanning data, process it, and compare the results of this evaluation with the results of the on-board Syntron's analysis. It was an automatic procedure, long routine for the Halutian, and his regular brain used the opportunity for more emotional considerations. Perry Rhodan's voice echoed from his memory, a voice that Tolot knew well and whose nuances he could interpret. Something in that voice hinted at amazement and excitement, along with a certain tension. Something had happened in this planetary system that had greatly astonished Rhodan.

The readings of the instruments in front of Tolot changed and new scanning data reached his overbrain. He reacted immediately and touched several control fields. A diagram appeared on the main screen: a schematic depiction of the star system with the asteroid belt, expanding as he approached, in the center. The scanners showed several energy signatures: four came from the Terran ship's crawlers, while a fifth and considerably weaker one originated from a capsule that moved between the debris of a primitive and, in terms of energy, largely dead spaceship.

But that was not all. Out in space, in the cold night between the numerous lifeless wanderers in the asteroid belt, yet another form of activity was in progress.

The Halutian's overbrain came to the same conclusion only a fraction of a second after the on-board Syntron, as the regular brain proudly realized: *Teleporter*.

Three red eyes watched as the signatures of the four crawlers disappeared from the field on the main screen, along with the pattern of discharge spikes from the teleportation energy. A few seconds later, the capsule also disappeared.

The Halutian ship's highly sensitive scanning systems registered the echo of an energy pulse from the depths of the asteroid belt, and the on-board Syntron immediately calculated appropriate course vectors.

Icho Tolot leaned forward, switched on the hypercom, and sent the Terran ship an identification signal. At the same time, his overbrain gave the Syntron a command: the ship accelerated and approached the asteroid belt from "above." Its defensive and offensive readiness level remained unchanged.

A human face appeared on the communication screen: its skin was dark and its hair bushy and curly. "I am Alemaheyu Kossa, communications officer of the PALENQUE. Greetings, Icho Tolot."

"I greet you, too," the Halutian replied. It sounded like the rumbling of a threateningly nearby thunderstorm. "My friend Perry Rhodan sent me a message calling me here. He said he had something important to tell me."

"I'll inform the commander. Please have a little patience."

Icho Tolot gestured in confirmation with one of his four arms while the other three operated the controls in front of him. The pulse echo of the teleporter energy grew increasingly faint and finally vanished entirely, but the hyperdetector had determined its origin point: an asteroid with a diameter of 1259 kilometers.

The curly-haired man disappeared from the dialogue screen and a few seconds later Icho Tolot saw a woman with short black hair, striking dark, almond-shaped eyes, and prominent cheekbones.

"I am Sharita Coho, commander of the PALENQUE. Welcome to the Ichest System. I know that Perry Rhodan

sent you a message."

"I left at once." Icho Tolot waited, and when the commander did not respond, he asked, "Can I speak with Rhodanos?"

"I'm sorry," the Terran woman replied. "There was an incident on board. Perry Rhodan is in some kind of coma."

Concern dominated the regular brain's thoughts as the overbrain evaluated the changed situation. "Is his life in danger?"

"No. He seems to be caught up in a dream. Apparently his mind is somehow merged with portions of the data storage unit that came from the wreck of a Lemurian generation ship."

The overbrain added this information to a complex mathematical analysis model and attempted to make connections between still unknown factors using initial extrapolations.

"Immediately after my arrival," Tolot rumbled, "I registered energy signatures in the asteroid belt. Four of your crawlers and a capsule that apparently came from a piece of wreckage from the generation ship. Teleporter fields have shifted the crawlers as well as the capsule. I am flying to the place where the fields were generated."

For one or two seconds, Sharita Coho stared at him in surprise, then leaned to the side and spoke with a member of her crew. Tolot only understood some of what was said, but suspected that the commander was verifying his statements. Perry Rhodan's message to him, the discovery of a Lemurian generation ship, and the presence of Akonians, not to mention teleporter fields that had transferred four crawlers and a Lemurian capsule somewhere else—all that had aroused the Halutian's interest.

"You're right," Sharita said after a few moments. "The crawlers really have vanished. We've lost contact with them."