

And the Enemy Was Us
by Rachel Woodlock

Corporal Walden Baker was not the type of grunt anyone would want to pick a fight with on a good day. Raised rough on a plantation farm - south side of Mars Colony Theta II - he had joined the Interplanetary Special Forces (ISF) at the age of sixteen and had seen more battle duty in the last four years than even those nearing mandatory retirement age of thirty standard Earth years. Today was not an ordinary day, however: Corporal Baker was being warp-shipped out on the most important mission of his life.

TOP PRIORITY COMMUNIQUÉ
TO: CORPORAL WALDEN BAKER
FROM: THE SUPREME COMMANDER OF EARTH AND THE UNITED
PROTECTORATES

URGENT MISSION TO GANYMEDE SATELLITE TO DEFEAT ENCROACHING
KAYA FIGHTERS THREATENING SOVEREIGNTY OF THE UNITED
PROTECTORATE. THE KAYA MUST BE DEFEATED AT ALL COSTS.
THOROUGH SUBTERFUGE IS OF UTMOST NECESSITY. UNIFORMS
SUBSTITUTED BY WHITE CAMOUFLAGE. THE FATE OF MILLIONS DEPENDS
ON YOU.

SIGNED
MICHEL ROMANO
SUPREME COMMANDER OF EARTH AND THE UNITED PROTECTORATES

For the tenth time Corporal Baker read through the top priority communiqué he and the other members of X-Z unit had each personally received from the Supreme Commander. What an honour, to be personally requested to fight for the protection of the entire civilised galaxy.

The Kaya were space-scum who spread like a virus on every planet they encountered, but no one had expected them to reach as close to Earth as Ganymede. Baker had never had the opportunity to kill a Kaya before, in fact, he had only ever seen an artist's rendition of one that appeared on the ISF information bulletins, but Baker knew the Kaya were a threat that surpassed anything ever encountered before. No Kaya was going to reach closer than 100 metrics before he would pump its slimy body full of ionised radiation. Baker grunted "hooyaa" in anticipation and caught a grin from Corporal Tom "Shanks" Ryan sitting opposite him.

"Gonna nuke me some snakes today!" Baker shouted over to his buddy.
"Hell yeah, bring it on." Shanks retorted.

The Kaya were reputedly very similar to human beings – a head, two arms, two legs, upright and possessing opposable thumbs – the main difference was in their bodies

being entirely covered with layers of small scales to protect them from their home planet's hot atmosphere: at least, that was what Baker had learned from the ISF bulletins. Earth and the United Protectorates had only had a year of a shaky peace after the Great War of '22 between the Satellite settlements and Earth. In fact Supreme Commander Romano had won the world election on the promise to bring the Satellites under Earth's control and having accomplished this, was the most popular war-time leader since the twentieth century's Winston Churchill. With the Kaya appearing and threatening the fragile existence of Earth and the United Protectorates, there was hardly anybody to be found questioning Romano's capability as Supreme Commander.

Glancing through the communiqué for the eleventh and final time, Baker flicked off his Porta-puter catching a glance at the .jpg wallpaper of his partner Alice Howard he habitually kept on the puter desktop. Baker was a hardened soldier with little time for romance or relationships, but Alice was special. He had met her while doing a tour of duty protecting the Mars colony settlers from a rebellion uprising eighteen months ago. Like him, she was a corporal in the ISF, although two years younger in service. Their brief fling to relieve sexual tension had turned into a steady relationship and Baker found himself fondly missing the Earth woman. Secretly he had even thought of proposing marriage, if they could both manage to make it to thirty and retire on service pensions. But right now, Baker could not afford to look too far into the future, not with the Ganymede mission to concentrate on. As part of V-Y unit, Alice had been shipped out two days before him, on a secret service assignment to whereabouts unknown, which meant he could not even cell-phone to let her know he had received a communiqué from Supreme Commander Romano himself! Well anyway, he could show her on his return.

Ganymede was drawing closer now, with only half an Earth hour of warp travel to go. The soldiers of X-Z unit had been instructed to wear camouflage of special white space-suits to help them hide in Ganymede's icy plains where the Kaya were supposedly stationed, and Baker took a moment to look over the fibreglass casing of his white helmet to check for any faults or cracks that could mean the difference between life or a quick but agonising death on landing. He thought about the upcoming mission, and his chance to finally see and hopefully slaughter his first Kaya.

"X-Z unit Preee-paaare for landing" shouted the squad leader, a small and balding army grunt who Baker had served under several times. The soldiers tensed as they felt the camouflaged space ship shake violently as it entered Ganymede's atmosphere. Upon landing, a scout was sent out to survey the icy landscape and report any signs of Kaya activity. Ganymede was uninhabited on this side of the satellite so any tracks would have to belong to the alien enemy. After forty Earth minutes, the scout returned and excitedly reported the existence of trailing footprints leading back to what looked like an icy outcropping.

Baker tensed as the unit prepared itself for the first assault. With ionising guns set to the maximum setting, they headed off in pairs, silently tracking through the snow to

reach the outcropping. Bursting upon the Kaya camp, the surprised alien enemy had little hope of surviving. X-Z unit fired at anything that moved and after only twenty minutes, all Kaya bodies in their pale blue spacesuits lay motionless on the icy ground.

“Wooooooohoooo, we did it bayybeee!” radioed Shanks and kicked at the motionless body of a Kaya.

Baker was surprised it had been so easy, and he wandered through the Kaya camp to get some kind of an idea about their reptilian natures. His eye was caught by what looked like a Porta-Puter, but that was impossible, unless the Kaya had somehow managed to get their hands on Earth equipment somehow. Baker bent down to pick up the Puter and almost keeled over in shock. It was standard ISF issue, the same as his own. Quickly he flicked on the switch, with a grim knot in his stomach. His own face stared back at him from the desktop, and with a sinking feeling he double clicked the icon named “Communiqué”:

TOP PRIORITY COMMUNIQUÉ
TO: CORPORAL Alice Howard
FROM: THE SUPREME COMMANDER OF EARTH AND THE UNITED
PROTECTORATES

URGENT MISSION TO GANYMEDE SATELLITE TO DEFEAT ENCROACHING
KAYA FIGHTERS THREATENING SOVEREIGNTY OF THE UNITED
PROTECTORATE. THE KAYA MUST BE DEFEATED AT ALL COSTS.
THOROUGH SUBTERFUGE IS OF UTMOST NECESSITY. UNIFORMS
SUBSTITUTED BY PALE BLUE CAMOUFLAGE. THE FATE OF MILLIONS
DEPENDS ON YOU.

SIGNED
MICHEL ROMANO
SUPREME COMMANDER OF EARTH AND THE UNITED PROTECTORATES