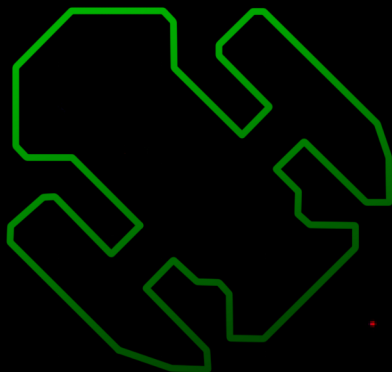


TOMMI SALMINEN

ETERNAL DOCTRINE



Based on the universe of
STAR CONTROL
by Fred Ford and Paul Reiche III

Eternal Doctrine

THE UR-QUAN MASTERS SERIES

Groombridge Log

Eternal Doctrine

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Tommi Salminen

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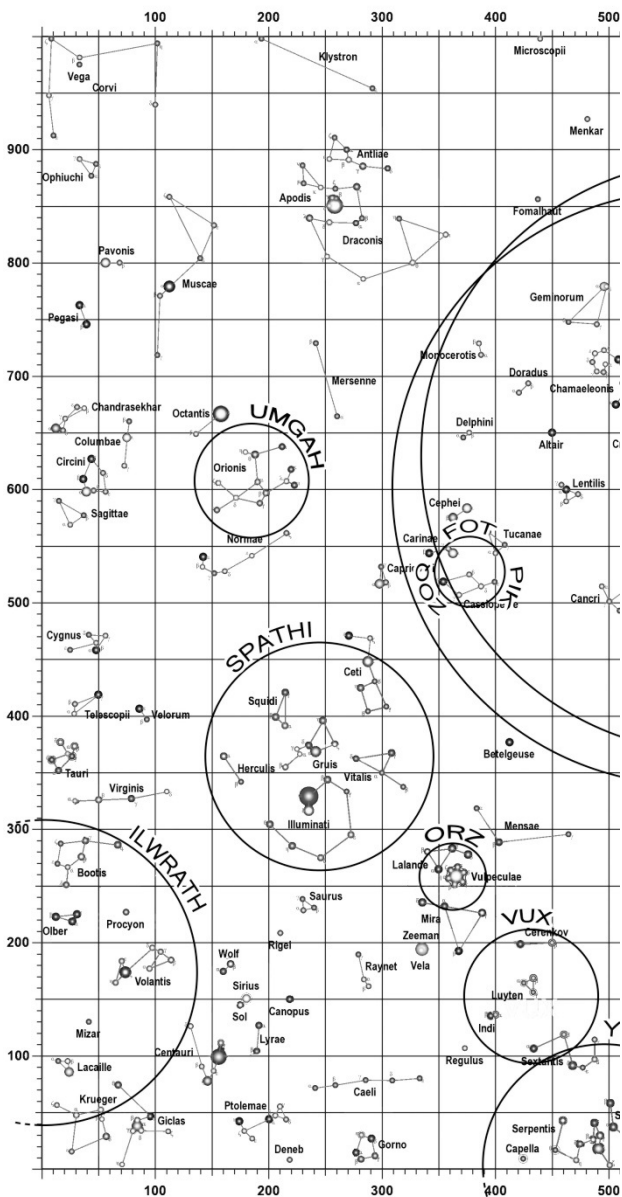
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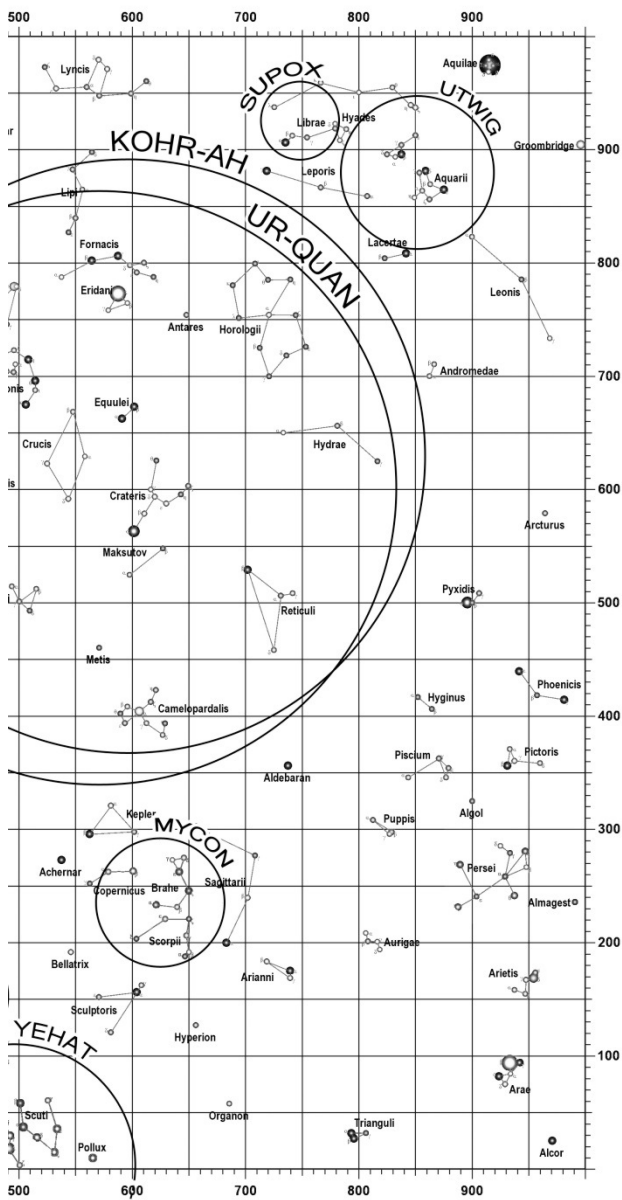
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The map on the previous pages details the spatial relationship between the stars in our known region of the galaxy. The spheres of influence were updated by Gennadi Samusenko on August 11th 2155. The positions are based on hyperspace coordinates, which may be unsettling to some students of true space astronomy. Defined long ago by Chenjesu stargazers, the constellations are now accepted by all races of the old alliance as the standard.

Due to the great difficulty in pronouncing the Chenjesu language, each race has translated the names into their own tongue. When it came time for Earth to adopt this system, the United Nations decided to use traditional astrological designations, assigned at random. This has caused some confusion, but it is considered preferable to the suggested alternative: using the names of past politicians.

CHAPTER 1

GATHERING THOUGHTS

August 5th 2155, Sol, 175.2 : 145.0

The monitors showed absolutely nothing where there had been an asteroid the size of a Shofixti Scout vessel just seconds ago.

“I guess we could call the test a success,” Zelnick proudly summed it up.

“But where did it go?” Dujardin wondered, still checking the radar. “Could it really have been pulverized entirely?”

If you really wanted to, you could see a slowly expanding ring-shaped cloud of dust at the center of the Hellbore Cannon’s firing sector.

“McNeil, how’s our combat batteries?” Zelnick asked.

“We’re at about 20 %,” the weapons officer replied, “but they’re charging a lot faster than before. We can still use the point-defense laser system with full power.”

“We’ll test that next,” Zelnick said and then ordered Samusenko to steer the ship inside a cluster of smaller asteroids.

There were several laser turrets mounted on the point-defense module. They should be able to fire in all cardinal directions simultaneously. Zelnick asked McNeil to try to hit all nearby asteroids as quickly as possible.

“It should be all about selecting the targets,” McNeil explained as he tapped his console rapidly.

Indeed he wouldn't have to actually aim the shots, unlike with the main weapon. The laser turrets would automatically follow their selected targets and, not surprisingly, they wouldn't have to lead their targets.

"Here we go," he declared and pressed the fire button.

Several laser beams immediately hit their targets with surgical precision and quickly moved on to the following targets. In just a few seconds there were only a handful of asteroids in one piece left in that cluster. And then the firing came to a halt.

"That's it, the batteries are dry," McNeil reported.

"Impressive," Zelnick said, sounding very pleased with his ship.

"*Impressive*," Captain Wu commented over the radio.

"*Scary*," Captain Fwiffo added.

Their Orz companions had no comments.

In addition to the Vindicator, their current fleet now consisted of Wu's Seraph, Fwiffo's Star Runner and two Orz Nemeses named **Flamenco** and **Fox**, supposedly captained by individuals referred to as **Heavy** and **Wet**. Trent and his crew were also aboard the Vindicator, along with the captains and crew for all the Zoq-Fot-Pik Stingers left behind at Gamma Circini. It made things a bit cramped in the crew module, but it was bearable since they knew that it was only temporary – their plan was to fly straight to Gamma Circini after finishing their business at Procyon.

Gruber was in a bad mood on the morning of the day when they were supposed to enter the vortex leading to Procyon. He was walking slightly faster than usual as people often do in that state of mind. If there had been trash cans nearby, he would have thought about kicking them, but still probably refrained from actually doing it. That thought made him proud of his composure.

Why the bad mood, he asked himself. It was only the time of his monthly meeting with the psychologist. He had always considered it a reasonable protocol for every crew member to talk with a psychologist regularly. The catastrophe of the first manned mission to Mars had proven the importance of taking care of mental health on a long-duration space mission.

Still, there were some who thoroughly despised the protocol*, but Gruber was pretty sure he wasn't one of them. He had never felt that he'd want to hide anything. And Eduardo Vargas was a particularly likeable psychologist.

Gruber soon reached Vargas' door. He was about five minutes early, but knocked anyway. Soon he heard footsteps approaching the door and then it was opened.

"Ah, Adam," Vargas greeted him on a first-name basis as psychologists always seem to do. "Do come in."

Gruber nodded in a polite way, stepped inside and took a seat in a designated chair as he had done four times before already. Unlike the chairs everywhere else, this one was really comfortable.

"How are you feeling?" Vargas asked as he also sat down.

Gruber decided that he should make the most of this conversation and gave an honest answer.

"I feel irritated."

His answer appeared to surprise Vargas and to Gruber's observation it seemed like a positive surprise. This annoyed him.

"What irritates you?" Vargas asked.

Gruber was feeling extremely uncomfortable already.

"I'm not sure," he said, "but I think it's this meeting."

* for example those with the intention to kill the entire crew

Vargas laughed a little, indicating that he wasn't offended. He gave an understanding smile, although he obviously didn't yet understand.

"Is this the first time our meeting bothers you?" he asked.

Gruber re-checked his mind and then confirmed that this was indeed the case.

"What has changed since the last time?" Vargas continued his inquiry.

This, in Gruber's opinion, was the problem with psychologists. They never told you anything, only asked questions. Of course a lot of things had changed. Their last meeting was after they had left the Supox homeworld. After that they had narrowly escaped destruction in the encounter with the Kohr-Ah, but there had been some casualties. Also, they might have met the Precursors, but forgotten all about it. Also, they'd seen and heard all kinds of disturbing things and the victory over the Ur-Quan – and more importantly over the Kohr-Ah – was nowhere in sight.

Gruber found himself thinking in Hayes' annoying listing-of-bulletins voice. He tried to shake it off. The listed points were just all the ridiculously big things. There were so many smaller things on his mind that he couldn't make a list of them.

"I don't know," he finally admitted, meaning that all that had happened shouldn't have affected his mental state regarding the psychologist meeting. "I was hoping you could tell me."

Vargas smiled at him again. He really seemed like a positive type.

"Who are you thinking about?" Vargas then asked.

This sudden question caught Gruber by surprise and he panicked a little. Was he thinking about someone in particular? Probably not, but now, after a question like that, he would inevitably think of someone. He checked who it

was, hoping that there was nothing too embarrassing about it...

He first saw Lydia, doing her own things somewhere in the background as she always did. Then there was Zelnick and the lone Orz trooper in the hangar, Lily as she looked in the academy, great, then a row of officers: Samusenko, Dujardin, Iwasaki and... *grandpa? What the hell are you doing here?*

"Lydia," he then answered truthfully, forcing his mind to return to reality.

Vargas was prepared.

"What has changed between you and Lydia since our last meeting?" he asked.

"She's not here," Gruber said. "She's at the starbase."

After saying that Gruber started to realize himself that it was indeed Lydia's absence that bothered him. But why? They weren't that close. Did he want them to be? He had to admit that there was some kind of a connection between them, though. Now that Vargas had found the problem so quickly, which was commendable, maybe he could find out something else about Gruber as well.

"Would you like her to be here?" Vargas asked as was expected.

How uncool, Gruber thought of his answer to come.

"Yes."

And he was supposed to be a steady old man.

"Why isn't she here?" Vargas continued on the path with only one possible outcome.

Gruber sighed.

"Because I wanted her to stay at the starbase," he answered. "She wanted to stay on board and Captain Zelnick would have allowed it, but I said that this isn't the right place for her."

"And why do you think you said that?" Vargas asked.

“Because it’s the truth,” Gruber explained. “We do dangerous things here and this is not her war. I wanted her to live as normal a life as she could under these circumstances.”

Vargas had gotten to the bottom of it and they both knew it.

“So,” Vargas began, “the pieces fit together rather well, don’t they?”

It took Gruber a second to understand what Vargas meant.

“You’re right,” Gruber agreed. “I have no regrets.”

Vargas kept on smiling – the bastard.

“You should call her,” he suggested.

Gruber had to disagree right off the bat.

“Are you saying I should use the ansible for private communications? Captain Zelnick would never approve—”

He then had to stop in mid-sentence. He looked at Vargas who was looking right back at him, clearly thinking exactly what he was thinking.

“Ok, so the captain **would** authorize it,” Gruber continued. “But it would make me look pretty damn stupid.”

“That would be a change,” Vargas sniped. “Who would think badly of it?”

Gruber was running out of arguments, although it wasn’t an argument, but he still felt like he was losing. He decided to take the path of least resistance for a change.

“Alright,” he agreed. “I guess it would be okay for me to check how she’s doing.”

“I’m sure you’ll feel better,” Vargas assured him and then checked: “Is there anything else on your mind?”

“Can’t think of anything,” Gruber answered without thinking, which meant that apparently there wasn’t anything.

“What do you think about our current mission?” Vargas asked, moving on to another topic.

Gruber was finally able to relax a little.

"I'm really anxious to see the Chenjesu," he explained. "While I have my doubts as to whether we will actually be able to contact them, we have every reason to try."

"And what happens if we succeed?" Vargas asked.

Gruber gave it some thought.

"Then we'll have a talk with them," he said to buy himself some time.

Then he admitted to himself that he had very high hopes and expectations on how much the Chenjesu could actually help them. He had to say this out loud and continued.

"The Chenjesu are under a slave shield, but I still believe that they can tell us what we should do."

"You're looking for guidance," Vargas pointed out. "What do you think about Captain Zelnick?"

Again Gruber panicked a little. He checked his mind, wanting to make sure that there were no doubts about his loyalty to Zelnick. He soon found out that he had nothing but respect for the man.

"I didn't mean that the captain wouldn't know what he's doing," Gruber corrected. "There's nobody I'd rather have as my captain right now. What I meant was that the alliance needs counselling."

"Of course," Vargas replied, making it evident that there was never any intention to question Gruber's loyalty. "And what do you think about fighting our enemy?"

He sure knew what questions were the most difficult ones, Gruber thought. The Ur-Quan they had met outside Alpha Eridani had given an impressive speech. Gruber knew that listening to the enemy too much always carried the danger of starting to see things their way, which would be troublesome, since in a war you should always be fighting for the good against the bad. But even though he had known to be cautious, the speech had gotten to him. He now considered the Kohr-Ah their main enemy and he felt, curse

him, sympathy towards the Ur-Quan. He told all of this to Vargas.

"I see," Vargas commented. "You're not the only one. There are some who believe that the Ur-Quan really are defending us from a greater evil."

"Exactly," Gruber agreed, "and it bothers me."

Vargas took a deep breath.

"There has seldom been any ultimate evil in history," Vargas pointed out. "All the terrible deeds have been terrible only because we think they have. Yet there always are some who disagree with those who are right, eh?"

Gruber wondered whether he got Vargas' point, but he did agree with what he was saying. *There always is the One Truth and some **barbarians** who disagree with it. Then, after a few decades, it might turn out that the **barbarians** were right. Of course that isn't the Ultimate Truth either and thus the circle goes on and on. But how did this relate to the Ur-Quan? Are we now the **barbarians** and the Ur-Quan are actually doing the right thing? No. Enslaving an entire species could never be right. Although, the Ur-Quan did say that they did that for our own good – to keep us from destroying ourselves and also to keep anyone else from destroying us. So... what? Are the Ur-Quan some galactic fairy godmothers who travel across the galaxy saving everyone? Do they consider themselves as such?* No, Gruber refused to believe that.

"The Spathi believe in Ultimate Evil," Gruber remarked to avoid the actual subject.

His evasion worked.

"Ha-ha, indeed" Vargas laughed. "We surely have met a lot of alien species and learned a lot in the process. What are your thoughts about our new friends and enemies?"

Gruber's first thoughts were of the suspicious Spathi delegation at the starbase.

Six months have passed since the Precursor starship Vindicator arrived at the starbase in Earth's orbit. The Ur-Quan are busy fighting a civil war, but their forces are still grossly superior to those of the hastily assembled New Alliance of Free Stars.

Both a carrot and a stick are bound to be needed when the Alliance deals with alien races. As Captain Zelnick of the Vindicator said: If you plan to save the galaxy, you have to be prepared to push a few old ladies down the stairs.

This book continues where Groombridge Log left off and concludes the novelization of Star Control 2.



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