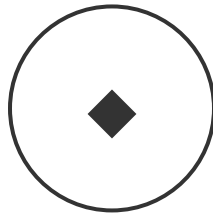


INTERPRETERS OF THE REALM



Patrice

BOOK THREE

Chapter One — The Abduction

A free sample chapter

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Patrice Olson's Journal

Chapter 1 – The Abduction

I was on my way to Space Camp in Houston when Morgan abducted me. The flight to Houston was as much as the camp itself. I'd swept out planes, carried cargo, and done chores at home to save up half the money for the flight. My parents gave me the rest. I'm going to be an astronaut someday and go into space. I'm already in space, but I mean under the power of the United States, not aliens.

I had to fly into Seattle last night and sleep in an airport chair overnight in order to catch the flight from Seattle to Denver this morning. We were en route from Denver to Dallas when the plane went down.

It's very suspicious that the plane went down just when Morgan was looking for interpreters. Maybe our crash was a little too coincidental. I don't trust him.

My parents are bush pilots in Alaska where people use planes in remote areas the way most people use cars in the suburbs. There aren't any roads or runways for most isolated areas. In the winter, my parents have skis on their planes. In summer, they use either wheels or pontoons depending on whether they are landing and taking off from a runway or a lake.

My parents were both Air Force pilots when I was born. They flew training aircraft, both jet and prop, when they were trainees. After that, they flew bombers, transports, fighters and experimental aircraft of all kinds. They were some of the Air Force's best pilots.

The Air Force separates helicopter pilots from the rest of the pilots early in their careers, so my parents never flew military helicopters. They took private lessons, however, and have flown every type of civilian helicopter there is at one time or another.

My parents left the Air Force to join NASA's astronaut program. They left the program a year later to be bush pilots in Alaska so they wouldn't have to work for anyone else anymore.

I'm only telling you this because they've taken me along wherever they've gone. Ever since I was old enough to sit up, I've been propped up in the cockpit of an aircraft, at first on their laps and then in the co-pilot's seat. They let me handle any controls I could reach as I grew up. Now I can fly anything.

Morgan, the earless, tiny-mouthed alien that abducted us was standing in front of us looking thin and old when we realized we'd been taken aboard his ship. He doesn't scare me.

My parents have always told me to ask for what I want and if I don't get it – to demand it. Some people won't give you what you want if you ask, but will knuckle under if you make a demand. Anyway, it never hurts to try.

“Return us to our plane this instant!” I tried to sound bold and authoritative.

Morgan didn't flinch and he didn't have the courtesy to turn around. He gave me a sarcastic reply, deliberately misunderstanding what I'd asked for.

“Your plane has crashed in Oklahoma. Would you like me to scatter little pieces of you everywhere like your luggage and fellow passengers?”

I heard Hudson and Gwynneth stifling a gasp.

“Return us to Earth then,” I continued to use my no-nonsense, I’m-giving-the-orders-here voice. “And do it now!”

His tired old voice droned, “Please sit down and be quiet.”

I could see I needed a new tactic. Chinese water torture. Say the same thing over and over like a broken record until the person gets so sick of it that they give in. “I will not sit. Send us back to Earth.” Sometimes after five or ten iterations, it works.

Every time, Morgan replied, “Please sit down and be quiet.” He already knew about Chinese water torture.

Gwynneth glared at me every time Morgan said anything to me. I could almost hear her saying, “See! I’m better than you!” with her royal accent.

Everything she says has exclamation points. She doesn’t know how to talk like a normal person. I think she took Shakespeare literally when he said, “All the world’s a stage.” She acts all the time.

She’s even more obsessed with hair, clothes and makeup. She had the nerve to come up to me in the airport and suggest that I let her wash my hair in the ladies’ room. Her hair wouldn’t be perfect either if she’d slept overnight in an airport chair.

She said something about giving it more body and “a little different style”. I think I’d end up with curls everywhere like she has instead of my nice easy straight hair if I let her do it. No thanks.

Morgan showed us pictures of the ambassadors we'll be working for and Gwynneth wilted when she found out she wouldn't be working for the top ambassador. I could almost see her lower lip starting to quiver.

She's a combination social climber and airhead in one. I doubt anything practical or classy will ever come out of her mouth.

When the cleanup unit took the little Tootsie's makeup bag, she whacked into the wall trying to chase it down. Pretty funny. I think I'm going to call her Tootsie instead of Gwynneth. She'll like that about as well as I like her hairstyle ideas.

Since my parents were military, I picked up a lot of info about being an officer from them and from living on base. I could be an officer with very little extra training.

In a war, if an officer is captured, he has a duty to try to escape. An officer can't give up and sit around doing nothing waiting for the war to be over (or sit around in an alien spacecraft waiting to be probed).

I was the only one in this bunch with enough nerve to try to escape. Andico was too sick, Gwynneth was too busy with her makeup and Hudson was so determined to be an idealistic good little boy that he would never defy Morgan. When Morgan looked like he was going to leave the bridge, I made my attempt.

I leapt on him from behind and threw my arm around his neck. That's a good way to bring somebody down. Instantly, I felt as though he was choking the life out of me.

I couldn't breathe at all and I was sure I was going to die. I was surprised when Gwynneth suggested that he let me go. It was out of character. If she'd let him choke me to death, she could be the interpreter for the number two ambassador.

Then I heard Hudson say, “Stop fighting and he’ll let you go.”

I don’t know whether I believed him or if in my oxygen-deprived state, it was the only thing I could do. I stopped struggling and Morgan stopped strangling. Even failed escape attempts will tell you a lot about your enemy. I found out that Morgan could strangle me without ever laying a hand on me.

He is either from a very superior race or has a very superior invisible remote-control weapon. I think he’s from a very superior race. It will be a lot harder to escape, but I’m not going to give up.

While the other kids were having fun with the service unit and playing with their new clothes, I was checking out the ship’s controls. I think I could fly this bird.

The control panel on this ship isn’t very different from the panels on every other plane, copter, or vehicle I’ve flown or driven. I’ve flown a lot of different things.

Every vehicle has an accelerator to get things moving, a brake to stop them and a steering mechanism to keep them going in the right direction. I thought a small knob represented speed and provided both the acceleration and braking. A joystick was obviously the steering mechanism. Even Gwynneth would have been able to figure that much out if she hadn’t been so busy with her lip liner.

In planes, there is always some kind of navigation system to plot a course and then make sure that the plane is following the course during flight. I didn’t see one of those.

One of the more important features is the ignition. I haven’t seen anything that looks like a key or security code pad so I’m guessing that some form of telepathic input is used for security. I’ll see if I can hear what Morgan says or where he looks when he starts the craft the next time so

that I'll at least know where the ignition device is in case I have to hotwire this vehicle. My dad dropped his key in the snow one time on a glacier and he showed me how to hotwire his twin-engine. I could probably hotwire this craft, too.

Most craft have all of these things in logical positions on one console. There are other switches and gauges that are almost always in the same relative positions as well. I don't think it will be too hard to figure out where the controls for auxiliary items are now that I know where the primary controls are on the console.

So, I should be able to fly this bird with very little trouble if I get the chance. That chance will have to be when Morgan isn't around however since my neck still hurts.

It occurs to me that I didn't pay much attention during the early part of our flight to see which direction we were heading from Earth. Now, none of the constellations look familiar to me so I'm not sure which way home is from here. I'll have to check with Andico when we're ready to go. He knows a lot about astronomy and will know where we are.

I tried to get a weapon from the service unit, but no dice. Gwynneth got a new makeup bag when she went in. I wish I knew how she did it. No one else has gotten anything extra, so maybe Morgan gave it to her to keep her happy since she was on the verge of tears when she got the third ambassador instead of the lead guy.

I asked Gwynneth how she got the bag. She said she thought about what she needed and it appeared.

I thought about getting a gun or other weapon and a bag of trail mix when I went in since I was hungry and I needed a weapon. I didn't get either, but the trail mix didn't matter since I wasn't hungry after using the service unit.

I'm going to keep trying to get the gun every time I go in. I'll need some kind of weapon to get out of here.

I looked over at Andico. I don't know if he will make it much longer and it would be nice if he could get home to see his family one more time. I understand he has a lot of brothers and sisters at home. I wish I did.

I sat down on Andico's bench for a while to protect him from the cleanup units. He was awake but staring straight ahead at the floor.

To make conversation, I asked, "How long has it been since you were last home?"

His voice was very quiet and slow. "I was home last Christmas. I miss everybody, but it's crowded and there's no place for my suitcase when I'm there. We put it in a big plastic bag on the back porch and I have to fish for everything I want out of it."

"Do you have any brothers and sisters?" I already knew the answer, but I asked the question anyway.

Andico smiled a little but continued to talk slowly. "Five brothers and two sisters. I'm the oldest."

I wondered if there was room for all of his siblings to do back flips in the house. "Are they all into gymnastics, like you?"

He smiled again as though he knew what I was thinking. "No. It's a good thing since all of my lessons and coaches have been very expensive. One of my sisters likes to dance and the other paints and draws. My brothers are all into baseball because I have an uncle who was a semi-pro baseball player. He lives a few blocks from us and spends a lot of time with us." He

kind of smiled a little as he remembered. “Even though I’m the oldest, two of my brothers were already taller than me at Christmas.”

“Do they tease you because you’re so short?”

He laughed a little. “They razzed me when the brother that’s ten passed me up. He’s probably going to be the tallest one in the family.” He sat up a little straighter on the bench. “I don’t mind, though, because shorter gymnasts actually have an advantage in some of the strength exercises.”

He’s got a pretty good attitude. “Did you make the Olympic team?”

He laughed at that one. I knew he was too young. “Not yet, but I was a first sub on the Junior Olympics Team so there’s a good chance I’ll make it someday.” He slumped and looked at the floor again. “Well, there was a good chance that I would have if I hadn’t gotten the brain tumor.”

“How long have you had that?” I asked.

He shrugged. “Only a couple of months. We found out about it six weeks ago when I started getting dizzy and having headaches for no reason. My grandfather took me to all kinds of specialists in the Springs and Denver. They all said it was hopeless.”

“They didn’t even try to remove it?” I couldn’t believe that no one had done anything.

“No. They sent us to the Mayo Clinic. They told us that I had about a month to live. That was last week. The tumor is in the middle of my brain and they’d have to tear up a lot of brain to get to it. It’s pretty big so they can’t operate on it.”

I tried to imagine what it would be like to know that I was going to die that soon.

He continued. "My parents don't have enough money for surgery anyway even if something could be done. They won't take any money from my grandfather. He had to put me his insurance when I came to live with him a year and a half ago in case I got injured working out. My parents pay the extra money to have me on his insurance. They also pay for anything that isn't covered. I've heard them arguing about insurance on the phone so often I sort of understand it."

I was surprised that they could afford even that much. "Even though they have seven other kids to take care of? Won't your grandfather pay?"

"Of course, he would." Andico sounded eager to explain that his grandfather was a generous man. "He and my father argued when my dad dropped out of college to marry my mom. My dad finished his degree at night and has a good job now as an engineer in a manufacturing plant, but he told my grandfather when he left college that he would never take another penny from him since he wouldn't help them when they got married. He never has even though my grandfather has offered lots of times and we don't have much money because there are so many of us."

I had to admire his parents' strength of will. "They sound pretty determined."

He smiled again with pride. "They are. They're very proud of what we've done with so little money. They want all of us to have a chance to go to college. I'm supposed to get a gymnastics scholarship so I can go."

"I'm sure you'll make it someday," I said and I could have bitten my tongue until it bled after saying it. Just then, a cleanup unit came in and spared me the need for bloodshed. I took a whack at the little thing until it left.

After we landed on Fomalautis, the name of the planet that Morgan comes from, we walked through a park to our quarters. There are places to hide in the shrubby maze or the arboretum if I need to sneak back to escape.

While Tootsie and Hudson checked out their rooms, I stood guard for Andico. A cleanup unit came rushing in and I nailed it with a good kick. I didn't think he'd be back any time soon.

When I sat back down on the sofa, Andico was as pale as the silver of his robe.

"That thing's going to hack me up into little pieces. Dead or alive."

I could see that he was frightened and I couldn't blame him one bit. "I'll make sure the cleanup unit doesn't get you, whether you're dead or alive. I'll take you back to Earth if you die. I promise."

"You promise? You're sure?" He looked desperate, so of course I said yes.

"I promise." I meant it.

Hudson and Gwynneth (or should I say Tootsie?) took turns keeping the cleanup unit away from Andico as well. They laughed at me for kicking it, but I think it stayed away a little longer when I did.

When Andico was rested, Morgan took him to stay with his father, Abecasis.

When I saw Andico leave with Morgan, a cold chill came over me. I wondered why the Fomalairé didn't remove his brain tumor if they're so powerful and advanced. They didn't even try.

I would have thought that a brain tumor would be child's play for people who flew through space and choked people with invisible chokers. They diagnosed the tumor as soon as they got him on board – that's why there are four to serve three ambassadors – yet they couldn't fix him.

I get a funny feeling that they have something else in mind for Andico. Something sinister. We'll see.

Hudson went to his room for a while to write in his journal. He seems to like to be alone. He sat alone in the airport, too.

Tootsie checked out "The Lavender Room," as she calls her purple place.

Morgan came back without Andico after a while and he showed me a video clip of the Denatans.