

# Out of the Darkness (Babylon 5: Legions of Fire, Book 3)

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Centauri Prime declares war on the Interstellar Alliance in Book Three of the epic trilogy that continues Babylon 5's brilliant legacy . . .

Blind to the fact that he is a pawn in the Drakh's deadly strategy, Centauri prime minister Durla launches an overwhelming blitzkrieg, sending Centauri warships to devastate other races' homeworlds and pave the way for total conquest. Yet Durla is forced to fight a war on two fronts. Even as he mobilizes the massive space fleet for its glorious attack, resistance leader Vir Cotto works feverishly to counter the Drakh's evil influence on Centauri Prime.

Emperor Londo Mollari possesses the key that can reveal the presence of the Drakh, but to do so would spell disaster, so he is forced to remain silent. But when the Drakh bring another pawn into play--David Sheridan, son of Alliance president John Sheridan--the time for silence may be past. If Vir and the Resistance are to prevail, it will be only through action, and with help from very strange allies . . .

Peter David is famous for writing some of the most popular of the original Star Trek: The Next Generation novels, including *Imzadi* and *A Rock and a Hard Place*. His original works include the Arthurian novel *Knight Life* and the quirky werewolf story *Howling Mad*. He single-handedly revived the classic comic book series *The Incredible Hulk* and has written just about every famous comic book superhero. He collaborated with J. Michael Straczynski on the Babylon 5 comic book series, and with Bill Mumy, he created the Nickelodeon television series *Space Cases*. In his spare time, he writes movie screenplays, children's books, and TV scripts (including Babylon 5).

J. Michael Straczynski is one of the most prolific and highly regarded writers currently working in the television industry. In 1995, he was selected by *Newsweek* magazine as one of their Fifty for the Future, described as innovators who will shape our lives as we move into the twenty-first century. His work spans every conceivable genre--from historical dramas and adaptations of famous works of literature (*The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*) to mystery series (*Murder, She Wrote*), cop shows (*Jake and the Fatman*), anthology series (*The Twilight Zone*), and science fiction (*Babylon 5*). He writes ten hours a day, seven days a week, except for his birthday, New Year's, and Christmas. Chapter 1

Luddig wasn't a particularly happy Drazi.

He did not like the building to which he had been sent. He did not like the office within the building. And he most certainly did not like that he was being kept waiting in the office within the building.

Luddig was a first-tier ambassador in the Drazi diplomatic corps, and he had fought long and hard to get to where he was. As he drummed his fingers impatiently on the expansive desk he was sitting beside, he couldn't help but wonder why it was that things never quite seemed to work out the way that he wanted them to.

Seated next to Luddig was his immediate aide, Vidkun. They provided quite

a contrast to one another. Luddig being somewhat heavysset and jowly while Vidkun was small and slim. Not that Vidkun was a weakling by any means. He was whipcord thin and had a certain air of quiet strength about him. Luddig, on the other hand, was like a perpetually seething volcano that tended to overwhelm any who stood before him with belligerence and bombast. As diplomats went, he wasn't particularly genteel. Then again, he'd never had to be. His activities were confined mostly to his office and occasional backdoor maneuvers.

It was one of those activities that had brought him here, to Centauri Prime, to the place called the "Tower of Power." It was an impressive and elegantly simple structure that, when viewed from the ground, seemed to stretch forever to the sky.

Luddig had not come here on his own, of course. It had been set up meticulously and scrupulously in advance. No one on the Drazi Homeworld had been aware that he was coming to Centauri Prime . . . well, not "officially" aware. He had brought Vidkun along primarily to have someone to complain to.

"This is how they treat Luddig of the Drazi!" Luddig said in disgust. He was one of those who chose to affect the popular Drazi habit of referring to himself in the third person. "An hour and a half we wait," he continued. "Waiting and waiting in this stupid room for this stupid minister." He cuffed Vidkun abruptly on the shoulder. Vidkun barely reacted. By this point in his career, he scarcely seemed to notice. "We had a deal!"

"Perhaps you should remind him of that, sir," Vidkun said with exaggerated politeness.

"Remind him! Of course Luddig will remind him! Drazi do not have to, should not have to, tolerate such poor attention to Drazi interests!"

"Of course not, sir."

"Stop agreeing!" Luddig said in annoyance, striking Vidkun once more on the shoulder. Since it was the exact same place, it left Vidkun a bit sore, but stoutly he said nothing. "You keep agreeing. It shows you are trying to mock Luddig!"

Vidkun tried to figure out if there was any conceivable way in which he could respond to the accusation. If he said it wasn't true, then he'd be disagreeing and thereby disproving the contention. Except he'd be calling Luddig a liar. If he agreed that was what he was doing, Luddig would shout at him that he was doing it again. Vidkun wisely chose to say nothing at

all, instead inclining his head slightly in acknowledgment without actually providing any admission one way or the other.

Clearly Luddig was about to press the matter when, with miraculously good timing, Minister Castig Lione entered.

Lione was a tall man whose build and general look bordered on the cadaverous. He had such gravity about him that he could have used it to maintain a satellite in orbit, Vidkun mused. Then he noticed several of the black-clad youths known as the Prime Candidates following Lione, dropping back and away from the minister as he walked into his office. Vidkun came to the conclusion that Lione already did have satellites. They were the youth of Centauri Prime, and as near as Vidkun could tell, the best and the brightest. Their loyalty to Castig Lione was reputedly unyielding and unwavering. If Lione had told them to break every bone in their bodies, they would do so and do it willingly.

Vidkun did not, as a rule, like fanatics. If nothing else, they tended to be a bit too loud for his taste.

"Ambassador Luddig," said Lione, bowing deeply in respect. For a man of his height, bowing was no easy thing. Luddig should have appreciated the gesture. Instead he scowled even more fiercely. Vidkun rose and returned the bow, and got another quick physical rebuke from his superior. "To what," continued Lione, "do I owe this honor?"

"This honor." Luddig made an incredulous noise that conveyed contempt. "This honor. This treatment is more like."

"Treatment?" His eyebrows puckered in confusion. "Was there a problem with your arrival? My Prime Candidates were given specific instructions to provide you full protection in escorting you from the port. I cannot, of course, account for the reactions your presence might engender among our populace."

"It has nothing to do with that--"

Lione continued as if Luddig had not spoken. "In case you are unaware, all foreigners have been banned from the surface of Centauri Prime. That is how highly charged sentiments have been running. Fortunately, as a minister, I have certain . . . latitude. So I was able to arrange for your visit to our fair--"

"It has nothing to do with that!"

Lione blinked owlishly. "Then I am not quite sure what you are referring

to."

"We had an arrangement!"

"Did we?"

"About Mipas!"

"Ah." Lione did an exceptional job of acting as if he had been unaware of what was getting Luddig so agitated. "You're speaking about the unfortunate, but necessary, attack on Mipas."

"Unfortunate but necessary how! Unfortunate, yes! Necessary . . . Drazi do not see that! Has Centauri Prime totally taken leave of senses? Or has Centauri Prime forgotten that Mipas is under Drazi jurisdiction!"

"Jurisdiction, yes. Curious how that happened, isn't it." Lione's calm, even lazy tone suddenly shifted. "Curious that the Drazi government paid so little attention to Mipas . . . until valuable minerals were found on it. Suddenly a world that was just beyond the outermost edge of the Drazi borders became Drazi property . . . when your government reconfigured the borders to allow for . . ." Lione actually chuckled, and it was not the most pleasant of sounds. ". . . to allow for the expanding universe theory. 'If the universe is expanding, Drazi territory must expand with it to keep up with natural law.' That was priceless. I have to admit. No one in the Alliance gainsayed you, simply because they were stunned by the sheer gall your people displayed."

"If Centauri Prime has issue with expansion of--"

Lione held up a hand, stilling the new torrent of words. "The Centaurum has no such issues. Expand territories all you wish. Reconfigure your borders and decide that you're entitled to take possession of the Vorlon Homeworld, for all we care. But Mipas, well . . ." and he shook his head sadly. "The fact is that our intelligence informed us that Mipas was acting in concert with, and providing aid to, certain insurrectionist factions here on Centauri Prime."

"Is lie!"

"Is not," Lione responded coolly. "The information we have received is quite definitive. Mipas was aiding those who would overthrow our beloved emperor and drive our prime minister out of office. Naturally, out of a sense of self-preservation, we had to take action."

Between gritted teeth, Luddig said, "We had an understanding."

"Did we?"

"Do not play games with Drazi!" Luddig warned. "Centauri Prime is as interested in mineral deposits on Mipas as Drazi!  
I know that! You know that! Everyone know that! We had arrangements!"

"And how much you must have enjoyed those arrangements, Luddig," said Lione. "Under-the-table payments made to you by certain Mipas officials. And you, in turn, pass those payments along to us. A token of respect; a tithe, if you will, to purchase our goodwill. And you succeeded for quite some time, Luddig. I commend you for your industry. And I commend you for the deftness with which you managed to cut yourself in to those payments. How much did you manage to keep for yourself? Ten percent? Twenty?"

"Do you think Drazi not take risks!" Luddig said hotly. "Luddig of Drazi has his own expenses, own concerns. Certain officials turn their own blind eye to 'under-the-table payments,' as you say. Money has to cover their eyes, too. It was beneficial arrangement for all."

"Yes, yes, I daresay it was. Just as this little arrangement exists with other governments, other 'officials' such as yourselves. Others who envelop themselves in cloaks of self-righteousness, more than happy to complain publicly about the Centauri, while you have no difficulty in private backroom dealings. I can smell the corruption in all the governments of your pathetic Alliance. The odor of hypocrisy permeates even the vacuum of space, Ambassador Luddig."

Vidkun watched in fascination as Luddig became so angry that the skin flaps under his throat stood out and turned pale red. "Luddig does not have to sit here and listen to this!"

"Stand if you prefer, then," Lione said lazily. "It does not matter to me." Then once again, his attitude shifted, from torpor to quiet intensity. "Understand this, Ambassador. We stand by the re...

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