

THE PALADIN CODE
THE JOURNEY
4TH EDITION



An Epic Science Fiction Adventure

Bradley C. Heer

THE PALADIN CODE

BOOK I

THE JOURNEY

4TH EDITION

THE EPIC
SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE
CONTINUES . . .

Bradley C. Heer

FictionFun™ Publishing

THE PALADIN CODE • THE JOURNEY

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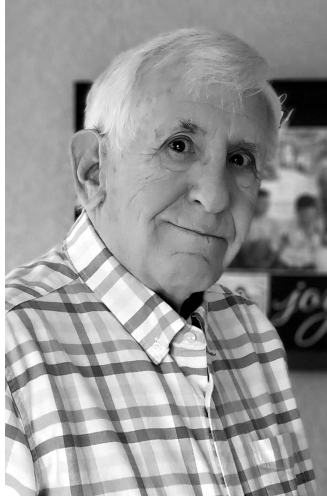
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THE PALADIN CODE • THE JOURNEY

*For Kenneth Heer
Of Topeka, Kansas
My father, steadfast supporter, and believer.*



Thank you for all the support and love.

To Mom, who was always there for me.

To my editor, Cathy, whose assistance made this book complete.

To my technical editor, Dawn Heer.

To my family and friends who encouraged me through the years.

CHAPTERS

Prologue 1
Chapter 1 2
Chapter 2 8
Chapter 3 17
Chapter 4 25
Chapter 5 35
Chapter 6 46
Chapter 7 60
Chapter 8 69
Chapter 9 77
Chapter 10 87
Chapter 11 97
Chapter 12 108
Chapter 13 116
Chapter 14 125
Chapter 15 135
Chapter 16 145
Chapter 17 151
Chapter 18 160
Chapter 19 172
Chapter 20 187
Chapter 21 203
Chapter 22 214
Chapter 23 223
Chapter 24 237
Chapter 25 252
Chapter 26 265
Chapter 27 276
Chapter 28 284
Next 289
Appendices 292
The Paladins Code 292
Characters 293
Maps 297

THE PALADIN CODE • THE JOURNEY

VERIDIAN



*Sometimes the journey
you are forced to take
makes the best adventure . . .*

PROLOGUE

PALADIA • KOFAR • LIBRIUM • SILVERIA • OPERARIA
• NOVA • OMEGA

“Paladia, Kofar, Librium, Silveria, Operaria, Nova, Omega,” Silvia spoke.

Silvia stirred in a restless sleep as her memories and dreams played out once again in her mind.

“Please verify identity,” LAD’s voice requested. A soft blue light scanned Silvia’s frame, reading her biometric signature and studying her DNA. The cold light sought her response to its query. This time in her dream, Silvia couldn’t give the command. She couldn’t give the final order for the destruction of her precious library.

She found herself once more sitting at her desk in her study. All the old familiar things surrounded her. For a brief moment, she was comforted by their presence. Suddenly, a blinding bright light surrounded her, sending everything that was familiar flying in a whirlwind of destruction. It had happened anyway. The decision was not hers to make.

Silvia turned over in her sleep. The Eternal surrounded her with love and peace. Her exhausted body settled back into a more restful pattern. She would need her rest. Today would be another day on the run, protecting the kids who slept around her. But for now, she rested in The Eternal’s embrace.



CHAPTER I

Silvia splashed some water on her face to clear her mind. The water in the little stream bubbled away as it swished from pool to pool, sliding down the mountain to the valleys below. She looked up into Veridian's sky, full of pinks and oranges, as the sun rose over the ocean to the east. It was a gorgeous morning. There was no sign of the horrors of last night in the sky or the green forest around them. Birds were singing in the trees. Small animals ran through the underbrush on the other side of the stream.

Conner, Elizabeth, Tim, and Mia. The young ones in her little band slept soundly. Silvia looked up into the blue sky and down the valley from where they had come. Below them was the sparkling lake of crystal where the Monastery had once stood. There were no remains of the ruined Monastery nor of its Library. She hoped that LAD had saved as much as he could by sending the precious data electronically to hiding places across the far-flung galaxy.

The Paladin network still survived. She could tell by the signal on her coms device.

The sun sparkled off the moving water, mesmerizing Silvia for a moment. The light pattern sent her mind off into secret places where she battled doubts and her own insecurities. Did she do the right thing last night? She was confident that her actions would have repercussions beyond the Paladins and even beyond Veridian. At that moment, the realization of what was lost hit her with the force of a hurricane in her soul.

Gone . . . it was all gone. The Library she loved. The Monastery that had been her sanctuary. The people she had known all of her adult life. All of it was gone. Gone forever. Swept away in a storm of bloody violence. The beauty that had dwelt in the gardens of the Monastery had been burnt out by the fire of the dragons the Skree attacked with. The quiet halls and prayer rooms had been reduced to rubble. The comforting voices of Paladins praying or singing were now silent. Nothing was left but a lake of molten crystal.

THE PALADIN CODE • THE JOURNEY

Silvia suppressed a gasp of overwhelming grief. The kids were still sleeping. She let a single tear escape her eye to trickle down her pale ashen cheek.

At that moment, Silvia felt the presence of The Eternal surround her. It bathed her in comfort and soothed her aching heart. She heard the reassuring voice of the One who loved her beyond knowing. “I am with you even in this, your darkest time. I will never leave you.”

In Silvia’s pain, that seemed of little comfort. “I destroyed it all.”

“You did the only thing you could do. You saved yourselves and the people of Veridian. It would have been complete destruction. An entire planet would have died.”

Silvia’s self-doubt still haunted her. How had they gotten into the ancient fortress of the Paladins? How had they breached the defenses? Who were they, for that matter? More questions ran through her mind than she could process.

“All those questions will be answered. The answers lay in the data that is scattered across the galaxy. You must find and reassemble The Paladin Library,” stated The Eternal.

She had escaped the Monastery with her young charges: Conner, Mia, Elizabeth, and Tim. But they had left with very little. Some supplies and basic gear. No actual weapons, no fundamental knowledge. For now, her mission was to keep them all alive. Beyond that, she would go to the nearest backup node of the Paladin Library to retrieve the information that might be the key to their survival. There would be data on who was attacking them and what they wanted.

Silvia was brought back from her internal struggles by a shout from the nearby jungle.

“Silvia! You need to come take a look at this!” shouted Tim.

She turned into a blur heading for the sound of Tim’s voice. Conner had snapped from deep sleep into action in a heartbeat. The young warrior was right behind her. As they entered the dense jungle, they were quickly disoriented by where Tim was.

THE PALADIN CODE • THE JOURNEY

“Over here,” shouted Tim. The two came up behind him and stopped, astonished at the sight before them.

Hanging from the torn and mangled branches of a blackened tree was the corpse of a dead Skree. It had been one of the Skree that had Halo jumped to attack the Monastery. Lightning had hit it on the fall into the planet’s atmosphere. The enviro suit had caught fire, burning the Skree to the charred remains hanging before them. The corpse's feet dangled just above the ground. At its dangling feet was the box that the creature had carried. It lay there broken. When the package had burst open, it had spewed its black poison all over the Skree and the Pawpomb tree it hung from. The DNA had combined with the tree, causing it to mutate and deform into a monstrosity. The beautiful tree that had once been was now a twisted perversion of its former self. The bright green fruits had turned black. They pulsed with a life form that was alien to Veridian. Truth be told, it was a new life form the galaxy had never seen. Dr. Keith’s technology was recombining DNA in strange and unexpected ways, producing mutations. The pulsing sacs were in various sizes and stages of development. A few lay at the foot of the gross transformation, empty.

Silvia turned to Tim. “I told you not to wander away from the group.”

“I had to go,” replied Tim sheepishly.

Silvia turned to everyone, including Mia and Elizabeth, who had joined them in the jungle. “From now on, you never go alone, never. That includes me. It is for our own protection.”

Silvia turned back to examine the twisted and blackened thing before her. The Skree weapon had infected it to its very core. It was dying. The Pawpomb shuddered and twisted in an unnatural way. The fruit had all gone bad, and now held who-knows-what in loose bags that moved with embryonic horrors.

Clarissa stirred restlessly in her sleep. Even unconscious, the disturbing images of the blast’s destructive powers haunted her. Her world was one of beauty and grace. The explosion had blown that fantasy

THE PALADIN CODE • THE JOURNEY

away in an instant. She did not know if she could ever create again or be a part of that world.

She stirred. As she did, she felt the warm shape of Hunter sleeping next to her. She drew closer, settling her head on his chest. He naturally wrapped his arms around her so she could feel safe again.

“Morning,” he whispered gently to her.

“Can we just stay here?” she asked.

“I wish we could, but I must go on a mission to find a missing girl. You must get away from this chaos.”

“Where will I go?”

“Vicki will take you to my home world of Crested. I have a house where you can rest away from this chaos and heal. It is a good place to hide away for a while. You will enjoy it,” he said gently.

Clarissa didn’t respond. She just curled up, drawing within herself. Hunter held her closer for a moment, kissed her on the forehead softly, and then got out of bed to begin preparing for their departure.

Mia screamed. “I saw something move in the bushes!”

Silvia turned to face the direction that Mia was pointing to. The green vegetation rustled in the jungle. The bushes moved again on the other side of the clearing. Menacing growls followed more rustling as the creature quickly darted from one location to the next.

Silvia grew concerned. It was at this point she realized her options were limited. Her Giz currently held the last backup of LAD, the Paladin Library’s AI, so she couldn’t use it as a weapon. Her staff lay near the pool where the group had slept.

Silvia placed herself between the menacing sounds in the jungle and the kids. “Stay behind me. Conner, watch our backs.”

“I’m on it,” Conner replied.

Silvia drew upon her talent and raised her arm with an open hand. Silvia’s staff whirled through the air in a blur to land in her firm grip. She

held it solidly, shifting it into a defensive position using both arms. At that moment, their unseen enemy burst from the undergrowth. It flung itself at Silvia with all of its fury. Silvia used her talent and staff to push back, deflecting the charge before it reached the group.

Thrown back towards the jungle, the creature landed on its four feet. They finally looked at the animal as it turned swiftly to face them. It was all black from head to toe. Even the sharp teeth in its jaws were black. It was about the size of a large dog covered in silky black fur. The creature was feline in appearance. But the features were slightly warped and twisted. The animal snarled in rage. Its long tail twitched back and forth as it began to stalk them. It constantly moved, forcing them to change position in an attempt to keep a good defensive position.

Silvia could feel the pain and rage that flowed from the creature. It paused for half a second and then leaped into the air. Silvia reacted swiftly, bringing the knobby end of her staff down upon the creature's head. She had dispatched it with that one swift motion. It was a mercy for the beast, who had been in pain as it continued to mutate before their eyes. Whoever had created such a thing absolutely had to be brought to justice for breaking the laws of nature.

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief, except for Conner, who scanned the jungle around them for more such creatures. Silvia was kneeling over the dead creature, examining it. She looked up into the tree at the pulsing bags where more such things were waiting to be born. Nearby were a few bags where those things had already emerged. She would need to do something about them now.

“Alright, everyone, stand back a bit,” said Silvia.

“What are you going to do?” asked Tim.

“I’m going to destroy this abomination against creation,” stated Silvia darkly. She clapped her hands together and rubbed them as if warming them up. “I’m not as graceful at this as Mrs. Westmoreland was, but here goes.” Silvia closed her eyes and began to whisper very softly as she lifted her arms and hands to The Eternal. A wind began to stir, growing with each word uttered by the Paladin. It carried her plea into

THE PALADIN CODE • THE JOURNEY

the trees that surrounded them. The animals of the jungle paused as if listening.

Those words carried a message for a specific being that lived and protected the forest. After a few moments, Silvia saw the first signs that her call had been answered. A little spot of bright light emerged from the dark regions of the jungle undergrowth. It appeared to float on the breeze, and then as it entered the clearing, the Sprit zipped straight for Silvia, landing in her outstretched hand. Within moments, other Sprits joined the first one. Her hands, arms, and upraised staff were covered with the little creatures.

As Silvia continued her whispered call, the Sprits responded by growing brighter and brighter. She reached out in the Spirit to them, warning of the strange thing that had invaded the forest. The dark tree waved and writhed before them at the presence of the Sprits.

Suddenly, all the Sprits took to the air, glowing brightly. The little creatures surrounded the mutant tree and its wicked fruit. A fire sparked from them as they danced about the tree and began to burn it to the ground. Every bit of it was consumed by the fire of the Sprits, from the tip to the very roots. They even burned the corpse of the hellcat that Silvia had dispatched. They departed back into the jungle depths as quickly as the Sprits had come.

Everyone in the clearing stood silent and watched in awe as the tiny protectors of the forest disappeared, leaving a blackened scar of ash. The jungle would not wait long. By the following day, new growth would appear on the dead spot to erase it from memory.

APPENDICES

THE PALADINS CODE

Love The Eternal with all your being.

Love others as much as you love The Eternal.

All life is precious, treat it as such.

Make every day a hallowed one.

Tell the truth always

Don't take what is not yours.

Honor those whom The Eternal has brought into your life.

CHARACTERS

Major Characters

Silvia “Of the Forest” • 76 sc (standard cycles)

Planet of origin - unknown

One of the last remaining Paladins. A woman who loves books who was the Librarian of the Paladin Library. She has led an adventurous life for a librarian. On various sabbaticals through the years, she has explored countless planets and discovered many cultures. She finds herself in charge of a group of young people. Silvia must protect and guide these summer students through yet-to-be discovered danger.

Elizabeth Alexandra “Eternal is my oath” • 16 sc

Planet of origin - Ophthar

Elizabeth is the fourth of eight siblings from a large family farm. Everyone helps out to get the work done. She is kind and compassionate, jumping in where needed to get work done. She has aspirations to become a vet and work with animals. Elizabeth is very aware of her surroundings, watching over the group. Her kind and considerate heart keeps the group balanced.

Mia Steel “mine” • 17 sc

Planet of origin - Jardor

Mia is a real galactic princess. She catches every boy’s attention. She comes from a very wealthy family who helped to establish The Paladins. Her parents died in a terrible tragedy when she was young. Her uncle took over and now runs everything. She is bright, but haughty. Because she has been spoiled, she is very selfish and thoughtless. She knows all about design and fashion, the latest trends, and the finest things in life amongst the wealthy. No one would have ever thought that she would be a help in the group's survival, least of all herself.

Timothy Celest “To Honor the Eternal” • 14 sc

Planet of origin - Agabar

He is a technical and scientific wizard. He loves knowledge, which he got from his parents who are both scientific nerds. His mind is always pondering the next puzzle, finding the next question to ask. Tim is comfortable around computers but awkward with people. He is most comfortable with AIs. He is a bit clumsy because his body is changing so fast that he can't keep up. His awkward looks are rapidly changing into a handsome, self-assured young man.

Conner Aldar “To be heard” • 22 sc

Planet of origin - Canopus

Conner is Mia's security guard. He is the oldest of the summer students. He is retired from the armed forces due to injuries from a battle with pirates. Conner is courageous and very skilled in self-defense. He wrestles with the ghosts from his past experiences in battle. He has the heart of a warrior, willing to do whatever it takes to defend those he cares for.

Scrap “Beloved” • 17 sc

Planet of origin - Veridian

Scrap is a teenager with dreams of becoming a Paladin. His past is a mystery. He was orphaned at a young age and lived on the streets of Shamble Town. On those tough streets, he learned to watch quietly, wait, and observe before taking action. Scrap was taken in by the Paladins. With his good looks and easy nature, he is a born leader in the rough.

LAD “Library Attendant Digital”

Planet of origin - Veridian

The AI of the Paladin library and a personal friend of Silvia. He holds the secrets that will destroy the Paladins but also save them in the end. The enemy relentlessly hunts for the knowledge that he holds. But he is unaware of what that knowledge is. He is a brain with an ever-changing holo persona.

The Paladins

Hunter • A bounty hunter whose specialty is finding things.

Castor & Pollux • Hunter's tracking beasts.

David • Paladin child rescued by Scrap.

Anne, John & David Destin • A young Paladin couple and their toddler.

Joe • The handyman for the Park of the Empire.

Maria • Cook for the Paladins.

Dr. Magnolia • Physician of the Paladins.

The Enemy

Dr. Keith • A mad scientist who turned herself into a mechanical monster. The chief servant of Salusasecunda.

Domo • Dr. Keith's major-domo and primary assistant.

Salusasecunda • An ancient evil that wishes to reconquer the galaxy.

The Skree • A race that is descended from Therapods. They served Salusasecunda in the Galactic Civil War. They are enemies of the Paladins.

The Grays • A race of small creatures enslaved by the Skree.

The Scavs • A race of wolf-like sentient animals who serve the Skree.

Augustus Steel • Mia's uncle. Up and coming galactic politician.

Miz Primm • Representative Steel's assistant.

Others

Ailith • "Noble battle or seasoned warrior" The Lava Dragon who now lives underneath the destroyed Paladin Library.

Auntie Mae • The owner of a tavern and inn in Shamble Town. She has the best breakfast in town.

Clarissa Haught • A very successful galactic fashion designer

Seeker • The name of Hunter's ship.

THE PALADIN CODE • THE JOURNEY

Eric & Amy Doland • Orchard farmers just below the Monastery.

Granny Good • An old trader who has been around the galaxy more than once. She specialized in items that are difficult to acquire.

Old Reliable• The name of Granny's ship.

Samantha • Clarissa's assistant and right hand.

Sam • A fishing guide and surfer on Veridian.

Marylin • Curator of the Park of the Empire.

Joe • The handyman for the Park of the Empire.

Byron• A smuggler out of Shamble Town.

Jixx • An Ardinian who is a small mammal and the owner of the Stardust, which is a bar and club.

MAPS
VERIDIAN

