

The Pardon

By T. E. Stazyk

“Hey, have you seen the latest news broadcast?” Flight Ensign Jeff Godson asked Commander Sarah Condrat as they reported to their ship for their next mission.

“Are you serious? I’ve been on leave. The world ceases to exist for me. What did I miss?”

“The Supreme Court has issued its Imperial Pardons for the year. Very interesting”

“Do you have the holo? Let me see it.”

The Commander’s interest in the news was understandable. As an explorer captain in the Imperial PanGalactic Fleet, she was intimately affected by court rulings pertaining to the conduct of PanGalactic explorers. The PanGalactic Empire consisted of 10^6 worlds and 10^{722} sentient beings. The benevolent and enlightened administration of such a vast empire required a huge navy for exploration, control, protection and communication. The discovery of new worlds and adaptation to new races and cultures often tested the people on the front lines and many problem situations relating to how people had behaved ended up being adjudicated by the Supreme PanGalactic Court. Sometimes new experiences were simply folded into existing laws and usages. Sometimes the court had to rule on ownership or access rights after consultation with any indigenous sentient populations. Too often, the court had to rule on the conduct of people who had been put in unusual or stressful situations.

During each of its sessions, the Court also heard appeals of previously decided cases. The Empire recognized the need for the appeal process and welcomed it. As the Empire grew, its knowledge and understanding also grew. It was appropriate to bring a new perspective to old issues. Sometimes new facts

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emerged which might affect the disposition of old cases. Therefore, the appeal process was an opportunity for the Empire to keep its living, evolving legal system up to date and also to allow for people to clear their reputations if new facts emerged to challenge an old conviction.

“So do you have it?” Condrat asked.

“Yes, it’s on my EFP scanner. I can upload it to yours or put it on the ship’s system. You really need to read it. I can’t do it justice.”

“Why is that? What cases did they do?”

“A lot of little ones, some higher profile. Like, the court reaffirmed the conviction of the Langdan II rulers for unjustified exploitation of a planet and maltreatment of the sentient population. Everyone knows those guys would do anything to get rich. I don’t know who even thought to appeal that one.”

“It’s simple. The heirs of the family want to clear their name. They think they can get some of the ill-gotten gains back.”

“I guess so. Oh. They exonerated Captain Valrood. That’s good news.”

“Great. He was never guilty. It shouldn’t have taken them so long to figure that out.”

An aide brought in Godson’s personal telecommunications unit. “Thanks, Depp. Here it is,” he said, offering a device to Condrat. “What you want to look at is the final resolution of the Gensys case.”

“Final? Really? I thought that would never get settled.”

“Totally final.”

“You mean they pardoned him? That will open up Pandora’s Box.”

“No. They let the conviction stand. The twist is they’ve ordered no more appeals. The court finally got fed up.”

“Let me see that.”

Commander Condrat found the tab she was looking for and activated the holo-projection and began reading the court’s ruling which had been reproduced verbatim.

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"Case 34876.87 – Sentients of PanGalactic vs. Lieutenant Adam Gensys"

This case, from one of the blackest pages in PanGalactic history, has been appealed by descendants of the Lieutenant at least seven times in the past. The facts are straightforward.

Lieutenant Gensys, a native of the Penrith system, was a planetary surveyor on a scout ship exploring the Sol system in 28845. After his third mission to the planet, his Captain came into possession of incontrovertible proof that the Lieutenant had grossly violated Article 2 of the PanGalactic Constitution, which explicitly prohibits the mingling of genetic material with creatures of races that have not been admitted into the PanGalactic confederation. This prohibition is designed to prevent the transmission of inter-species diseases and, more importantly, to prevent interspecies genetic disturbances resulting from incompatible or wildly different genetic compositions.

It is abundantly clear that the creatures in question were profoundly developmentally and mentally inferior to the Lieutenant. The creatures had very limited ability to use tools, extremely primitive communication skills and crude and unstable social structures. Indeed, the Lieutenant was nearly killed by several males of the same species, presumably over territorial rights. There is no question that the Lieutenant should have known the risks of genetic contamination he was running.

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All of this was documented by holoscans and eyewitness reports and the Lieutenant was convicted of multiple violations of Article 2 and sentenced to death. Violations of Article 2 remain the only capital crime in the Empire.

A support group to rehabilitate Lieutenant Gensys's reputation has grown up in the Penrith system. The group believes that the Lieutenant's conviction should be overturned, his descendants on Penrith be paid Imperial compensation, and his illegitimate descendants on Sol III be admitted into the PanGalactic family of sentients. Ignoring the abundant prima facie evidence of his guilt, they claim that the robust sentient population that has resulted from his miscegenation is mitigation of such guilt. Today the sentient population of the planet in question totals more than 4×10^9 . All of them carry the Lieutenant's genetic material.

The task before this court has been to consider the assertion that because a successful sentient planetary culture has resulted from the Lieutenant's transgression, the original crime is mitigated. Claimants state that if it hadn't been for the Lieutenant, the planet in question would still be populated by primitive creatures unable to manage their environment; and there does not appear to be much question that the infusion of Lieutenant Gensys's genetic material into the population did in fact bring about substantial leaps in intelligence and dexterity in the space of two generations.

However, we find a fundamental flaw in the reasoning that mitigation of the original crime results from the alteration of the genetic environment and creation of a new sentient species where none would have existed. Indeed,

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when we study conditions on the planet, we find unanimously that nothing could be further from the truth. Rather, Lieutenant Gensys's crime grows more heinous and egregious by the day.

It is true that the Lieutenant's offspring represented a quantum leap forward for the indigenous sentients on Sol III. In a few generations they went from being primitive anthropoids to a sophisticated society of builders. With staggering rapidity they developed advanced communication skills and their art and literature today can stand with anything the rest of the PanGalactic worlds have produced. The indigenous population are still at a loss to explain how they were able to leap forward from their primitive animal state to their present condition because there is no evolutionary record. This is because offspring with Lieutenant Gensys's genetic material possessed superior intellect and reasoning ability. This, coupled with the natural aggressiveness and hostility of the indigenous population, led to them quickly overpowering other anthropoids to become the dominant force on the planet.

Unfortunately, its art is the only positive contribution this race has produced. Throughout their history they have spent more time and resources destroying each other than any other known race of sentients. This killing is unique in the known universe. Sometimes two individuals may kill each other over some slight, real or otherwise. Other times, huge masses of people, driven by ideology, greed and fear will embark on killing orgies which decimate the population. One of the most alarming aspects of this violence is that it has become more generalized over time. Initially, the fighting was limited to volunteers hoping to make their fortunes. As larger governments waged war

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against each other, they compelled young males to fight for them. Various positive and negative inducements were provided to ensure continued compliance by populations. Now, however, the entire population is involved in generalized global warfare. Anyone can be a soldier and anyone can be a victim. The more random and senseless the killing is the more popular it has become. It is possible that the positive impact of Lieutenant Gensys's genetic contribution is being diluted out of the population so that they are reverting to their former savagery. They have developed incredibly sophisticated and powerful weapons, all of which represent various violations of the PanGalactic weapon restriction treaty guidelines.

The planet has an incredible number of addictive substances and all of them are exploited by the population. The physical and mental problems caused by these substances is well known, but their use continues to grow at an alarming rate.

Some of our specialists in psychogenetics believe they have traced this tendency for self-destruction to an unusual allele they find in the genetic makeup of the Lieutenant's legitimate descendants on Penrith, but this is based on unproven theories and incomplete research and is outside the purview of this court.

Mentally, the planet's inhabitants are incredibly malleable and will believe almost anything. They arbitrarily accept bizarre explanations of the non-physical world and will kill each other over strong beliefs that are based on no empirical evidence whatsoever. As a result, the entire population is highly unstable by PanGalactic standards. They are truly dangerous and

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should not be allowed to come in contact with other sentients, which is the main reason why they should not be legitimized.

As badly as they behave toward each other, they treat other sentients on the planet, and the planet itself with utter disdain. The Lieutenant's offspring think that their planet was created solely for them. They plunder it without regard to the future and have exterminated a host of other sentient species, and very nearly themselves. They are extremely sophisticated scientifically and they know that they are depleting natural resources at an alarming rate. However, they refuse to curtail their consumption and in fact continue to increase demands on their non-renewable resources. Greed, ignorance and superstition prevent them from making use of renewable sources and minimal use is made of primitive subatomic fusion for power. They have already begun to fight and kill each other over scarce resources.

Resource allocation is based solely on power relationships. The medium of power is, of course, primarily military, but also economic and over time is also developing an information management and manipulation component. Currently the cabal wielding the majority of military and economic power also has a vested interest in maintaining the demand and price for diminishing resources. This further fuels consumption and curtails development of alternate, sustainable resources.

Their claim to sentiency can be challenged based on their breeding behavior. The planet's population has long since passed the point where planetary resources can sustain the population. They know this and even have mathematical models showing when depletion will occur.

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Even more unique than their violence and short-sightedness is the variety of cults they have. Each cult claims to have the answer to cosmic questions of where the race came from and where it is going. Fortunately, none of them speculate on the existence of Lieutenant Gensys. In fact, it is difficult to differentiate the cults from one another, but the members of each cult appear willing to die for their beliefs. Much of the mass killing that has taken place over the history of this civilization has been done in the name of one cult or another.

Alarming, these cults seem to contribute to their irrational and self-destructive breeding practices. Breeding is considered to be a right and in some parts of the planet a duty. Most cultures on the planet use the standard male/female bonding family grouping that we see in a number of other imperial cultures, but there is no assessment of suitability for parenthood and even people with no education, resources or talent are permitted, and often encouraged, to breed to increase the number of followers of their particular cult.

Distribution of wealth is wildly imbalanced, largely due to the warlord-like structures that take the form of governments in most areas of the planet. An increasingly large percentage of the population live in overcrowded, inefficient urban centers which consume vast amounts of resources. Millions die of disease and starvation. Resources are disproportionately allocated to the rich and powerful. They enjoy space, food, and luxury and their pets eat better than the poor. Warlord government policies are

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designed to maintain the unequal distribution of wealth and also to protect the rich from the poor.

Even the most cursory examination of conditions on this planet convinces the observer that Lieutenant Gensys is guilty of an enormous crime. Through his thoughtless act, he has effectively destroyed an entire world and the lives of billions of creatures. It is the opinion of this court that the question should not be whether to pardon the Lieutenant and legitimize his descendants but rather, whether to incinerate the planet to protect the rest of the universe from the inhabitants. Our experts have watched with alarm as they have made primitive attempts at space travel. Of course we cannot permit them to destroy other planets or cultures and will intervene if they move beyond what appears to be experimentation at this point.

It is therefore the unanimous conclusion of this court that the judgment against Lieutenant Adam Gensys is hereby *affirmed*. Further, his successors are hereby enjoined to accept this judgement as final and to cease and desist in further appealing the case.”

Commander Condrat shook her head as she finished reading. “Post this to the crew,” she told Godson. “We haven’t had any problems before, but this will be a good reminder of the rules when we are out there.”