# Divine Wind

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The eight approaching Kamikazes became visible in the T’ran flagship’s telescreens. Interceptors had already been dispatched. Seven of them found their mark. The eighth missed, and the surviving Kamikaze came through the distortion field and by sheer chance caught the T’ran hospital ship. Missile and ship bloomed into a great red rose, then the remnants of each raced one another down to the ice-mantled surface of the planet Ozar, round which the T’ran space fleet was orbiting.

The T’ran commander convened her highest-ranking officers on the flagship’s bridge. The decision they arrived at had been in embryo stage since the T’ran-Pwalm battle had begun. After dismissing the officers, the commander summoned Gunther Kenyon, missile man first class, to the bridge.

The commander’s name was O’Malley, and she was as tall as Kenyon was. Her resplendent white uniform lent width to her shoulders and accentuated the trimness of her hips. Kenyon had heard it said that hair grew on her chest.

Her gelid eyes impaled his soft brown ones. She said, “Perhaps you’ve guessed why I sent for you.”

He shook his head. “No, Commander.”

“I will enlighten you.Kamikaze originally referred to the pilot of a sacrificial war craft. We now use the word to designate unmanned missiles. Had the Pwalm Kamikaze that just struck the hospital ship been manned, the pilot could easily have made a last-minute course correction and destructed its true target.”

“The flagship?”

“Yes. By this time their spy-beams must have relayed back to them that we’ve committed the age-old blunder of massing the brains of our war machine in a single ship. They know that once that ship is knocked out they can risk a frontal attack on the remainder of our fleet. Just as we know, from our own spy-beams, that they also have committed the age-old blunder, and that once their flagship is knocked out,we can risk a frontal attack.”

“But even without a flagship, either fleet would fight, Commander.”

“Yes, but deprived of intelligent leadership, neither could survive. . . . This has been an exasperating battle. The Pwalmians orbit the fourth planet from the sun, we orbit the fifth, and the planet we’re fighting for is the next one out, a blue jewel in the sky to be awarded to the winner. Hiding behind distortion fields that misrepresent the true positions of their ships and disorient target sensors, the two sides hurl explosive stones at each other and on occasion, through chance alone, obtain a hit. A most ridiculous battle. Perhaps, in a hundred years, one side or the other might find its true target and be able to move in for the kill. But we do not have a hundred years, and neither do the Pwalmians. What we are about to do tomorrow, they would undoubtedly do the day after.”

Kenyon said nothing. He waited, as he had always waited throughout his life.

“Tomorrow,” the commander said, “we will launch a true Kamikaze.”

Her ice-blue eyes were locked on Kenyon’s. He knew what her next words would be before she spoke them. “And you, Gunther Kenyon, because of your years of dedication to the service and because of the courage and level-headedness you have exhibited so many times under fire, have been chosen for the role.”

“A Divine Wind,” Kenyon said.

“Yes. A Divine Wind. You have been nominated to enter the ranks of the Honored Dead.”

She picked up a pointer and stepped over to an illuminated holo-map that covered part of the port bulkhead. The map reduced the actual scale of distance so that the entire theater of operations could be shown. Even on such a reduced scale, this would not have been possible had not the three planets involved been on the same side of the sun.

With the end of the pointer she touched a glittering little world near the base of the map. “This is Ozar, Karowin’s fifth planet, round which we are in orbit. This”—she moved the pointer’s end a considerable distance up and to the left and touched a blue world—“is Blazon, Karowin’s sixth planet, which this battle and the entire war are all about. And this”—she moved the pointer’s end far to the right and much higher on the map and touched a brown world that had two moons—“is Mitar, Karowin’s fourth planet, round whose face and moons the Pwalm fleet is in orbit.”

“No-man’s-space,” Kenyon murmured.

The hairy tildes of the commander’s eyebrows lifted. “You’re a student of history, Gunther Kenyon?”

“Only in the sense that I’ve read about the ancient wars. It’s necessary to go only one World War back from the one that gave the common languageKamikaze to find no-man’s-land.”

“A commendable intellectual feat, nonetheless, for an enlisted person.” The commander laid the pointer down. “My reference to the map was to point out that Blazon is so remote from the trajectory you’ll be following tomorrow that only the wildest deviation from your course would put it in jeopardy. I felt you should be reassured in this respect, since the warhead you’ll be carrying will be vacuum-shielded anti-matter.”

Kenyon was stunned. “I thought there was a mutual agreement between both sides to refrain from using H-bombs, laser rays, and anti-matter.”

“There was. But such agreements are adhered to only by losers. A war has only two objectives: One, to win it in any way possible; and two, to keep intact that which you are fighting for. Tomorrow a wave of unmanned Kamikazes will precede you. They will be knocked out by Pwalm interceptors, but by then you’ll be almost to the distortion field. After you slip through it, you will go on manual, search out the flagship and ram it. Your trajectory will take you to that part of the field our sensors indicate the flagship to be. It won’t be there, of course, but it won’t be far away. Your warhead will not only destruct the flagship but all the other ships in the area, thereby assuring our ultimate victory.”

Kenyon thought of a number of things to say, but he dared say none of them, so he said nothing.

“Launch time will be 0600.”

Kenyon saluted and left.

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On his way down the free-fall tube he was seized by two female officers, drawn into a storeroom, and raped. It was not a new experience, but it sickened him because of the subjugation it implied. When he reached his tiny cabin, he lay upon his bunk and stared at the gray ceiling. Formerly, enlisted men had been provided with armed guards when they were summoned topside, but since the last T’ran-Pwalm engagement there had been a shortage of enlisted personnel, and armed guards could no longer be spared. For this same reason the fraternization parties formerly held at monthly intervals in the main rec hall had been discontinued, augmenting the likelihood of rape.

In addition to his bunk, his cabin contained a footlocker and a bench. Although small and Spartan, it was a sizable cut above the fetid common quarters shared by the enlisted men beneath his rank. He was in charge eight hours a day of one of the flagship’s Kamikaze launching stations. He had just completed a tour of duty when the commander had summoned him to the bridge.

His final tour of duty.

There was no one he cared to say goodbye to. There was an enlisted girl he slept with on occasion, but she was no more than that. He had no true friends; he wasn’t a gregarious man. And he wouldn’t have dared to say goodbye to anyone in any case, for although the commander hadn’t said so, he knew his forthcoming mission shouldn’t be bruited through the ship.

Although he didn’t question the rightness or the wrongness of the task to which he’d been arbitrarily assigned, it dawned on him as he lay there on his bunk that he didn’t want to die. That he didn’t want to join the long gray ranks of the Honored Dead.

While reading of the ancient T’ran wars he had read of the fifteen- and sixteen-year-old Japanese boys who had waited eagerly to board thekaikens and make their way underwater to glorious immolation against the hulls of enemy ships. He didn’t feel the way they must have felt, although he’d been similarly inculcated.I’m too old , he thought,I’ve seen too many springs, too many blue-skied summers. I’ve seen trees exchange their paling autumnal dresses for brand-new gowns of white far, far too many times. I’ve got up too many times at dawn and seen the day put the stars to bed. Living is comprised of a million little things, and those little things, when added together, spell love, and beside that love, the dirt that also comprises life shrinks into an indiscernible mote.

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He was launched into no-man’s-space at 0601.

The cockpit the machinists had installed in the Kamikaze was just behind the warhead. Directly before him lay the control board. Above it, the forward viewscreen showed the night and the stars. To the right of the screen, a smaller one showed a section of the T’ran flagship bridge. Beneath the forward screen, the rear viewscreen showed the receding flagship. There were small windows on either side of the cockpit that looked out into the waste of space. In the right one he could see Karowin, the sun.

The manual override control was inset in the left arm of his seat. Beneath the right arm was a tiny button with which he could activate the warhead should he miss his target. In building the cabin, the machinists—perhaps out of irony, more likely because the commander hadn’t wanted them to know that she and the other officers were contemplating a true Kamikaze mission—had installed an ejection hatch. Thus Kenyon, before the moment of contact, could jettison himself from the cabin. Even without an anti-matter warhead to contend with, such an ejection would have had dubious value; with one, he would merely obtain the privilege of dying outside rather than inside the missile.

In the forward viewscreen he could see the bright yellow wakes of the eight unmanned Kamikazes that had been launched seconds before his manned one. He could see the distant crescent of Mitar, but he couldn’t see its two moons. And he wasn’t seeing Mitar where it truly was, for the Pwalm distortion field refracted its position.

I am a bomb, he thought.For this, I have lived my life.

He had lived the early part of it on the Old World, and he went there often when on leave. The Old World was the matrix of the T’ran Empire. The empire was constituted of an archipelago of planets along the galactic lens. The Pwalm Empire constituted another such archipelago deeper in the galaxy. Both races were the matured “plants” of “seeds” spread eons ago on the Old World and on Pwalm by a far superior, possibly an extragalactic, race. Neither the T’ranians nor the Pwalmians had detected each other’s existence till each reached a scientific stage that embodied interstellar travel and permitted extrasystem colonization. The war in which Kenyon now fought had been in progress for three years. It was being fought over Blazon. The galaxy was rich with dead planets, but inhabitable ones like Blazon were few and far between. And Blazon had never been “seeded” with intelligent life. It was an open invitation to both sides to spread themselves farther upon the face of space. The two fleets now confronting each other in the Karowin system had depleted the T’ran and Pwalm economies to a degree where a loss for either side would terminate the war.

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Kenyon tried to see Blazon in the forward viewscreen. It did not appear because the hull camera was focused on Mitar, or rather, on where Mitar seemed to be, and Blazon was too far to the left. He leaned sideways and looked through the left lateral window. He made out a minute sapphire at two o’clock. The planet’s blueness made him think of the Old World, and he turned his eyes away and leaned wearily back in his seat.

Halfway across no-man’s-space, the control board’s missile sensor-lights turned red. Interceptors were on their way. Commander O’Malley’s face appeared in the bridge screen. She had a small wart on her chin. In ancient, more romantic, days, it would have been called a “beauty mark.” “They launched only eight,” she said. “As yet, they’re unaware of you. Impacts will occur shortly before you reach the field.”

Kenyon said nothing.

He was no longer in the cockpit.

He was walking down a springtime street.

New leaves adorned the trees. He felt gay and sad. It was a street he had walked down before. He looked at the houses and the lawns, at the blue Old World sky. He smelled lilacs and saw their mauve, bouquetlike trees.The little things , he thought.Yes, the little things. The parameters we pay so little attention to; that spell love.

He came back to the cockpit when the advance Kamikazes began meeting their interceptors. Space seemed to wink. It winked again and again and again. Presently Kenyon found himself alone in the star-barbed night.

He watched the forward viewscreen. Mitar was a huge crescent now, and he could see the roundness of its dark side. He could see the gross shapes of the Pwalm ships. The flagship was the grossest of all. Beyond the ships he could see the little moons. They twinkled diamondlike in the sky.

The missile sensor-lights had gone out. The commander’s face was still in the bridge screen. “We can detect no more interceptors, Kenyon. But they know you’re there by now; they’ll be trying something else.”

Suddenly a girl appeared beside him.

She seemed to be sitting next to him on a nonexistent seat.

She was unlike any girl he had ever seen before. She had full cheeks and a gentle gaze, and her hair was dark brown and shoulder-long, and her eyes made him think of the Old World sky he had just walked beneath during his springtime stroll. She was wearing a white tunic that reached but little lower than her hips and seemed to be suspended from the nipples of her breasts.

The commander’s face still filled the bridge screen. Compared to the girl’s, it was a gargoyle face. Fury and fear had painted it gray. “Eject her!—she’s a bomb!”

Yes. A bomb. What other kind of girl would come to see him here in no-man’s-space?

The Pwalm sensor operators had detected not only his Kamikaze but his presence on board, and they had projected a gynecomorphous bomb.

“Eject her!” the commander screamed again.

He found that he could faintly see the bulkhead through the girl’s flesh. He raised the faceplate of his helmet. “I can’t. The projection’s not fully complete.”

“It’s not a projection—they’re transmitting her!”

“But she isn’t fully here. I can’t eject her till she is.”

“You must wait, then. And watch. She’s a genetic bomb. She can blow herself up at will!”

Kenyon understood. The girl had been born a bomb.

“You have only one chance,” the commander said. “The second her flesh becomes solid you must jettison her!”

One chance to free himself from one bomb so he could become another.

Two entry points into the Land of the Honored Dead.

He pulled the cockpit seat belt around his waist and buckled it tightly. He tried to grip the girl’s left forearm. His fingers went through empty space. He kept his hand cupped, moving it in accord with the slight vacillation of the arm, for she was not truly sitting beside him; she was drifting there, seated on a chair of air. His right foot sought and found the hatch-release control lever.

The girl’s arm remained fleshless. He sat there, looking at her face. It had none of the angularity or harshness of the faces of T’ranian women. It was rounded. Soft. Her blue eyes were fixed on his. She could see him, even though she was not fully there. He looked for hatred, saw nothing but the blueness of Old World skies.

She spoke to him in his own tongue, but her words weren’t synched with the movement of her lips. “I am the Goddess of Death.”

“I know.”

“I’ve been programmed to do what I must do. I’m sorry.”

On an impulse he told her about the springtime street down which he had walked. He told her about the sky and the trees and the lawns and the houses. He told her about the lilacs. “Such a lovely street,” she said, drifting there, promising death.

“I walked down it because I was thinking of all the little things I’d always taken for granted.”

“Don’t talk to her!” the commander screamed from the viewscreen. “She’s trying to throw you off guard!”

In the forward screen, the Pwalm ships grew like gray ghosts.

“I was thinking of the little things, too,” the girl said. “About where I used to live. About the kids I used to know. Nobody knew, not even myself, not even my parents, although they should have, that I was a bomb.”

“When were you told?”

“Less than an hour ago.”

“And you began to think of the little things then.”

“Yes. I thought of trees, too, like you did. And of birds and flowers. . . . When I’m completely here, you’re going to cast me out, aren’t you?”

“Yes.”

“If you find out before I do.”

“Yes. If I find out in time.”

“You won’t,” she said. “I’ll know before you will.”

“We’ll see.”

“You aren’t like the men of Pwalm.”

“You’re different from the women of T’ran.”

“The women of T’ran grew on the same trees the men of Pwalm grew on.”

“Not at first,” Kenyon said. “Once, they walked in mothers’ marches denouncing war. If it were up to them, they said, there’d be no more wars, ever. They forgot about Zenobia and Queen Elizabeth I and Margaret Thatcher. Or perhaps they didn’t wish to remember them. But it was in the books almost from the beginning that someday itwould be up to them. They changed then, or perhaps they merely became outwardly what they’d been underneath all along. But whether they changed or not, reality didn’t.”

“Why would they want to grow on trees like that?”

“It’s the nature of our species.”

“Damn you, Kenyon!” the commander shouted. “Don’t listen to her!”

“Why not?” Kenyon asked. “Soon, one way or another, I’m going to join the ranks of the Honored Dead.”

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The girl shifted slightly on her airy seat, and he had to recup his hand about her fleshless arm. “Yes,” she said. “The Honored Dead.”

“ ‘In Flanders Fields the poppies blow, between the crosses, row on row.’ ”

“Is that where your Honored Dead lie?”

“A few of them.”

“Why must there be an Honored Dead?”

He looked at her. She was all he had ever wanted and everything he could never have. “They’re an essential part of civilization. As long as fools keep joining their ranks, there’ll be more room for other fools to create new ideologies for which future fools can die.”

“Some fools have no choice.”

“I know. Fools like you and me.”

He squeezed his cupped hand. He felt a ghost of tissues. “No,” she said, “I’m not fully here yet. I seem to be because my awareness has preceded me.”

He tried to touch her face. He could almost feel it. “No!” the commander screamed. “That’s what she wants you to do!”

“I never thought,” Kenyon said to the girl, “that in walking down my springtime street I’d meet someone like you.”

“I’m sorry that I’m a bomb.”

“The lilacs are in bloom. Do you see that forsythia over there? Look—there’s a dogwood tree!”

“Such a lovely street it would have been to live on!”

He had recupped his hand around her arm. He felt her flesh grow firm. “Any moment now,” he said.

“Yes. Any moment. After all these years, we’ve met, only to have to die.”

“For this, we have lived our lives.”

He released her arm and closed his faceplate and kicked the hatch lever and ejected her a split second before she blew into a great red rose. In the redness he saw his own blood.

He threw in the manual override. “Kenyon, what’re you doing?” the commander cried.

“I am a Divine Wind,” Kenyon said. He altered the Kamikaze’s course.

“Kenyon, reset your course! If you hit Karowin, it’ll nova!”

“I am the breath of God,” Kenyon said, and headed toward the sun.