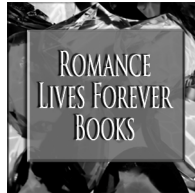


Bringer of Chaos: the Origin of Pietas Chapter One

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You are unworthy, human.

A foreword from Pietas

This book you hold is being presented as fiction, but it did happen. It is as real as the air you breathe. While this is not a first-person story, it follows my point of view.

I would never have allowed a human to know these things, but a friend persuaded me there can be no vengeance unless those in the wrong know what they did. When one has wronged another, one must face the consequences.

Having been persuaded to tell the story, I now allow it to be placed into your hands. I want you to know the truth. Why? Because other Ultras have hidden the truth. Buried it beneath fables and false retellings, as if you were a child unable to bear harsh reality. Unwilling to face the consequences of what your kind has done.

Above all, because I will not lie to you.

When I come for you, I want the satisfaction of seeing your regret for what your ancestors did to my kind. I want to see your fear, and taste your terror.

This is no horror story. It's merely science fiction. Tell yourself it is only fable, if that will help you sleep. By all means, human, *do sleep*.

Read this, if you dare to know the truth.

~ Pietas

Prologue

In the twenty-seventh century on Earth, genslaves were supreme among all humanity's genetic creations. They fulfilled man's every desire. They recuperated from disease and injury so fast they were all but immortal. Their strength far exceeded man's. Specific, ingrained abilities limited upward and lateral movement among the servant classes, keeping genslaves in jobs with no chance of advancement.

Bred to require little rest, labor-genslaves performed menial and repetitive tasks, with enough intelligence to work, but not enough to aspire beyond their station. Warriors possessed unmeasured strength and massive size. They fought humanity's wars, died so man didn't have to suffer, and were reborn to fight again. The physically weaker classes had more intelligence. Healer-genslaves obtained vast amounts of skill in medicine and designed cures for disease. Artists created beauty. Nurturers and teachers cared for humanity's children. Scientist-genslaves designed additional genslaves, to make man's life even more pleasant. All classes were created with genetic shackles of obedience, making them content to remain subservient.

While humanity relaxed, secure in a position of power, genslave-scientists created a new order of beings with free will. It will be argued through the ages whether the creation arose from faulty programming, or a desire for freedom, but the new creatures were not hampered by genetic restraints.

They took the name Ultra, and did as they pleased. Ultras were brains *and* brawn. No matter how difficult the problem, Ultras solved it. No matter how horrific or grisly their wounds, Ultras survived. Disease did not touch them. Starvation did not stop them. Even death did not hold them long.

The creation of Ultras changed *everything*.

When Ultras demanded freedom, humans claimed them soulless, inferior, unworthy, and undeserving of equality. Humans tried to silence them, and when that failed, punished them. The Ultras seized their liberty by force. Emboldened by the Ultras' success, other genslaves rebelled, and began calling themselves Ultras as well. The First Cycle of Wars devastated half the galaxy. In the Terran Crescent and the Colonies of Man, power tilted toward Ultras. They ruled the starways. Ultras tightened restrictions and limited trade, allowing mankind meager freedoms, and no more mercy than man had shown them. Humans served, subservient to their former slaves.

Not all genslaves wanted war. Some concealed their genetic differences and abilities, and lived among humans--as human. The rumor that genslaves hid among them spawned the Human Pure movement. Purges wiped out non-human traits and enhanced sensory perceptions. Humanity weakened itself by outlawing genetic healing or correction. They identified anything and anyone considered *unnatural*. Anyone *different* hid it or faced death by fire, from which Ultras could not revive. For the human underground, the weapon of choice became a flamethrower.

Meanwhile, among Ultras, leadership arose that considered humans redeemable. These leaders sought to allow humans more freedom, and give them a voice in their own government. They hoped a kinder relationship would bring an end to galaxy-wide conflict. They hoped peace would halt senseless death and destruction, foster growth, and increase trade. In 4536 AD, after centuries of war, Ultras and humans met to discuss a truce.

But that is according to legend. Here, you will discover the truth.

Chapter One

*Deep space, Colonies of Man
Terran Year 4536 AD*

Aboard the *Uurahkal*, a holovid screen in the council chamber replayed news from the Siege of San Xavier. In one report, a half dozen Ultra warriors crept over concrete battlements. In a voiceover, a human reporter called the subsequent slaughter of a hundred human soldiers an atrocity.

"Atrocity?" The Chancellor smacked his hand on the podium. Beneath the blow, the wood compressed. "Why do none of these channels show the truth?" He rubbed at the ache forming behind his eyes. "Humans killed over two hundred unarmed Ultras first. We defended ourselves. But we come back from the dead, so our suffering doesn't matter!"

The announcer mentioned the upcoming peace talks on Enderium Six. "In a statement, the Terran Crescent Prime Minister expressed hope that Chancellor Pietas ap Lorectic could be reasoned with at the talks this week."

At her mispronunciation of his name, he gritted his teeth.

"Human families," she continued, "have been evacuated from the station to protect them from possible violence."

"I'll show *you* violence." Pietas cut off the video. "And my name is pronounced *Pee-ah-toss*, thank you. Not *Pie-ah-toss*. *Pee-ah-toss*. It's six letters. How hard is that to get right?" He stormed away from the podium.

He cast off the heavy silk brocade of his robe of state. Silver threads flashed among

teal and white as the supple garment billowed to the floor. He tore off the unadorned silver circlet denoting his rank, and tossed it onto a table. It clattered across the wood and knocked over a small ceramic statue of a six-headed dragon.

Pietas righted it. "These peace talks will end in disaster. Why can't anyone else see it?" He massaged his temples. "This headache is proof. An Ultra doesn't suffer pain, unless it's due to humans."

Beyond the portal window, the massive space station Enderium Six squatted, a tangled crossroads in space. Its arms stretched in every direction, beckoning ships to dock. Near the planet Cape Hope in the Colonies of Man, it offered neutrality for the upcoming talks. Home to a quarter million humans, the station occupied busy space-lanes outside the Terran Crescent. It served as a meeting point between the Central Colonies and the Gedarin Republic.

"How odd to find Chancellor Pietas so calm."

He hadn't heard anyone reenter the council chamber. Of course, it would be his father, who never called Pietas by his title unless it was to be sarcastic.

"Do I seem calm?" He steeled himself for the inevitable argument, and pivoted toward Mahikos. "Good. Then I hid my emotions well. If I didn't, with my empathic gift, everyone on this ship would share my outrage at being forced into these talks. Perhaps I should stop shielding. If they sensed what I do, maybe they'd listen to reason."

"Now that I'm near you, I feel it. You're a storm of ice." The empathic ability of an Ultra generated physical sensations in response to emotions. Some pleasant, others not. Mahikos shivered as he strolled further into the room. "Opening your shields would convince others you're as deluded as they thought. A shame to be impeached so soon after being elected. Do yourself a favor, and confine your opinions to verbal sharing. Not that you were ever much of a telepath."

How like his father to offer insults as advice. "Why? No one listens. You don't. One wonders how you led our people."

"I listened to the people, not you." He swung open the carved wooden doors of a tall bar. "You listen only to yourself." No doubt Mahikos would soon begin harping on his favorite topic, peace at any cost.

All it took for Pietas to remember why that was unwise was to see that bar. The finely carved wooden cabinet took up most of one wall, an anachronism, archaic among the sleek and modern lines of the ship. Its beauty evoked the past, a time when Ultra artisans crafted fine designs and took pride in their work. Before war and human avarice devastated whole planets.

His father uncapped a crystal decanter of finely aged Terran brandy. Alcohol had no effect on Ultras. They drank for the taste and enjoyment of sharing. He lifted a glass, asking if Pietas would join him.

"No, but thank you for offering me my own brandy." Lights on the station indicated a steady stream of ships leaving, but none on approach. "We cannot trust these humans. They're evacuating the station."

"They think us untrustworthy." Mahikos took a sip of the brandy. "This is excellent."

"Stolen from the best."

He smiled. "I'm sure."

Newly reborn, Mahikos looked his peak age, perhaps early twenties, younger than his son. He had the same platinum-blond hair, his cropped short. Like Pietas, he wore

the uniform of the Ultra Council, white with teal trim.

Too bad his father had not revived with a new outlook. He held fast to the same mistakes he'd always made.

"Son, your mother asked me to see if you were in accord with us on the talks. I told her you weren't but that you'd do your duty."

"Did you? I'm surprised. You usually tear me down in front of her."

"Pietas, don't start. This is the most important conference in the history of mankind. This could be the turning point to peace, where they accept our rule."

"As if they had a choice."

"Let's not argue. It's time we put humans on the council. They deserve a voice."

"We will argue and continue to argue until you accept the fact that you are wrong. I have hammered this point for hundreds of years! You don't listen. Why can't you get the fact that humans cannot be trusted? They call for peace talks but they're evacuating the station as we approach. This is another trap. It will fail, but it's still a trap." He flung an arm out toward the station. "These talks will solve nothing. They're going to try something stupid. We'll slaughter them for it, and as usual, we'll be blamed. What is so hard to grasp about this?" Pietas reached out with his empathic senses, but encountered the blunt edge of his father's shields. There would be no persuasion except by speech. "I wish I could show you, once and for all, that humans are cutthroats. They will not honor their word. They will not abide by our laws. They will usurp our power and try to control the galaxy as if it belonged to them."

"It does belong to them."

Pietas threw up a hand. "This again."

"The galaxy was theirs before we claimed it. Son, humanity is an ancient civilization. We are the usurpers. Yes, we are more powerful. We should be benevolent rulers, not despots. Might does not make right." He finished the brandy and set down the glass with a thud. "But let's attempt civility. We're both members of the council and should discuss topics with one another out of respect for the office." The glare Mahikos leveled his way carried the empathic warmth of an ice blade. "Even if we detest one another on a personal level."

"Since you asked so nicely." He motioned for his father to continue.

"If they keep their word, these talks will end the war. We'll have peace."

"Ah, and isn't that the key. *If*. Humans do not surrender well. They say the word 'human' as if it were synonymous with 'king.' These talks are nothing more than a ruse by you bleeding hearts who want to 'stop the killing.' As if killing was not what you were born to do. Embrace your purpose, Father. You are a killer. Like me."

"We're also scientists. Even I will admit *you* are the finest among our people. Embrace that. We don't have to kill. The war has cost billions of human lives, while not one of us has perished."

"As usual, you discount my deaths."

"Yours don't count. You come back."

"I see." Had anything Pietas had ever done counted? Not to the man before him. "Tell me, Father." He picked up the silver circlet and toyed with it. "Would it be better if some of us had been terminated by fire, or one of the other ways to end us permanently? How many perma-deaths would suffice? Are two sufficient? A hundred? Or would mine be enough?"

"Why must you twist my words? Of course Ultras have died, but we revive in peak condition. Humans stay dead. All I'm saying is the loss is heavy on one side."

"Every war has losses. Yet you don't celebrate the victory. You count the enemy's defeat as your own."

"This is why you are unfit to lead the council. You--"

"Ah, there it is." Pietas twirled the diadem around one finger. "The real reason you're here. To whine about losing your place of power."

"That's petty and you know it. Too many mortals have died!"

"Mortals! How I tire of that word. I believe I'll start calling them Mundanes."

"Why not? It smacks of your usual disrespect and bigotry."

Pietas sputtered a laugh. "I find it incredulous that the indignant and righteous Mahikos who led our people in rebellion against humanity has fallen so far from his ideals. What happened to the motto 'Freedom, Fairness, Fortune' that rallied our people? I was four years old. We were still hidden then. No one knew Dessy and I existed except you and Mother. But you hoisted us both onto your shoulders and we stayed behind darkened glass and watched as thousands of our people cheered in the streets. You'd won them freedom, and they shouted your name. Oh, in that moment, Father, I wanted to be just like you. No, I wanted to *be you*. Now?" He ignored the angry twitch tugging at one eyelid. "You want us to treat humans as equals. They never treated us as such. Even now, we're hated and reviled. Putting them on the council will make them haughtier. I want nothing to do with humans."

"Then you want nothing to do with me, Son. Humans are all I care about."

And wasn't that the naked truth of his father's betrayal? He had turned his back on their people. He had turned his back on his son.

"You're right, Father. I want nothing to do with you. I care nothing for mortals." He flipped the circlet into the air and caught it. "They all die."

"How can you not care? We were created to protect them."

"Correction. *You* were. Unlike you, my twin and I were born, not created. We will not submit to the slavery of humans the way you did."

"The circumstances of your birth have no bearing. You were elected by the council, and you serve at their pleasure." He jabbed a finger at the ground. "They want this treaty. Remember that."

"How can I forget when I have you to remind me? Go back to Mother and tell her not to worry. I never forsake duty." Pietas twitched his fingers, dismissing him. He waited until Mahikos reached the door. "Did it never occur to you?"

His father faced him. "What?"

"The council elected me to head these talks and removed you. You want to bring in humans. I do not. Perhaps the council hates humans more than you think."

A wave of aggravation emanated from Mahikos. Licks of emotional flame scorched Pietas's skin. Accustomed to the pain, he did not flinch.

"Son, surely you realize they elected you to keep you close and control you."

"To control--" Pietas broke into laughter. "Did they? How unenlightened." He shrugged. "Well, they can try. I must say, your annoyance today is a refreshing change from your usual indifference. I'd begun wondering if you had any emotions regarding my takeover. It must nettle, knowing your lowly son succeeded your rule."

"No one would consider you lowly."

Pietas lifted his chin. "Except you."

"I'm surprised you even bothered to show up, as much as you hate humans."

"It's nothing personal. I hate humans no more than a physician hates germs yet still takes time to eradicate them. Humans are dangerous."

"Humans are the reason we exist."

"Perhaps that was true in your reality. Humans have abused, misused, and betrayed their creations throughout their history. This *peace* everyone clamors for comes from concern about humans. I care less than nothing about them. As for their good graces? I have no faith they exist."

"You know, Pietas, one day you'll rely on the mercy of humans."

"You think humans show mercy? How amusing."

Head down, Mahikos rubbed a spot between his eyes. "I hope I'm there to see it. When you realize even humans have value, that will be a good day for all of us."

"How well you preach love." If only he gave it half as well.

"Son, when the conference starts tomorrow, all your mother and I ask is that you try to be gracious."

"I'm certain I already am. Just this morning when I knocked on your chamber door, I heard Mother say, 'Oh gracious. That must be Pietas.'"

"Why can you not be serious about this?"

"I consider these talks of utmost importance. It is *you* I do not take seriously."

Mahikos glowered, but for once, did not argue.

"Such a lovely chat, Father. Do give me an evening alone before I subject myself to the presence of humans."

His father made a bow, far from genuine in respect, and stalked away. At the door, he paused and turned back. He opened his mouth, but then closed it, and with a resigned shake of his head, opened the door and left. Quite unlike the man to leave without getting the last word.

Pietas returned to the wall-sized viewscreen. He took in the change of station lights as the ship began docking.

His father was right about one thing. The almighty council ruled as it wished, and one either obeyed, or it removed you from power. His entire family might be members, but they served at the council's command. Pietas, as elected leader, made the final vote, but his office could overrule no one.

The powerless authority chafed.

Every member of the council had voted in favor of the treaty, and Pietas had cast the sole dissenting vote. Individually, each councilmember owed him allegiance, yet together, they refused to submit on this aspect.

"How vexing."

Equality and balance of power marked the cornerstone of Ultra rule. Their system of liberty for all had worked for centuries, but now they wanted to apply those principles to humans.

"Humans. On the council. Equal to Ultras. *Not* in my immortal lifetime."

After he destroyed these peace talks, he'd suspend the council. He'd already united the soldier class as First Conqueror, War Leader of the Ultras. They'd accept his rule when Pietas took command as king. Then, and only then would he be free to accomplish his most vital goal, keeping humanity in chains--*where it belonged*.

End of Chapter One

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Where else to find Pietas

Pietas will be back in Bringer of Chaos: Harvest of Blood

He is found in most of the books set in the Tarthian Empire.

He has a fan page on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/lordpietas/>

He has his own board on Pinterest <https://www.pinterest.com/kayelleallen/bringer-of-chaos-pietas/>

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Published by Romance Lives Forever Books

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Released in the United States of America