

ROBERT C. TAYLOR

A PRISONER OF HISTORY

The Emperor Chankrondor IV, when released from imprisonment, had bowed to his jailer, thanked him most politely for the hospitality displayed, and then, to show his own nobility and forgiveness, had the fellow elevated to the rank of Prison Master in the Royal Court. Trobar p'Arvellhion knew that he had no such royal perquisites to bestow upon his own jailers, but he had made up his mind that he would try to be at least as polite as the Emperor had been.

He was finding that hard to do. The outprocessing interview was dragging on, and the clerk who was conducting it seemed to have no intention of finishing it before the day was over. Outside the window of the cubicle, Trobar could see the shadows shift as the Star rose higher into the sky and then began its slow descent. The ships that rested on the landing field just beyond the prison fences now reflected the full glare of day off their silvery sides. The mountains on the other side of the red plain had been filled with deep shadows when the interview started. Now the shadows were filled with light, and the mountains themselves stretched out flat against the pale sky. The clerk went slowly over the papers while the present Emperor looked down upon him from the wall. He filled in blanks, checked boxes, occasionally asked a question. His pen scratched against the paper. Most of the time the only sound in the room was the quiet breathing of the two men, the shy hiss of the ventilation, and the scratching of the pen.

"We need to be thorough," the clerk had said at the start of the interview. "The Emperor Himself sometimes reviews these forms. We want to make sure that everything is correct."

He was very thorough, digging into all the facts of Trobar's life, his arrest, and his imprisonment. The detail of his investigation, as well as his patience, was astounding.

During the interview, Trobar learned two new things about himself, but after that he saw, with growing resignation, that the rumors were true and there was no hope that he would ever see Home again.

The first new thing he learned was that he had been convicted of belonging to a group that advocated the overthrow of the Emperor.

Trobar smiled feebly when he heard that. "It was just a lecture," he said. "I only knew one other person there, Chenkor p'Torlik. He invited me. I was an Historian, at the Imperial University in the Capitol. I had just received tenure. I specialized in the reign of Chankrondor IV. It was a lecture on the Republic, which preceded the reign of Chankrondor I. I didn't even hear the end. The police broke it up."

He sighed. It seemed so long ago now.

The clerk smiled at him again. "Surely, you should have appealed your conviction, that being the case. His Majesty's courts may make mistakes at times, but His Majesty Himself would have soon put things right."

"But I never even knew that a trial had taken place until I came here. I didn't even know what kind of meeting it was. Did I tell you that Chenkor p'Torlik invited me?"

The clerk looked down at the paper again. "Chenkor p'Torlik was the police spy who informed on all the members of the gang."

The clerk shrugged. There was, after all, not much to be done about it now.

The second new thing that Trobar learned was that he had been sentenced to fifty years of exile in the Penal Colony on T'arnp'ur, but that the sentence had been commuted to five years, with the right to become a citizen colonist at the end of that time.

"You will, of course," said the clerk, "receive the standard colonist bonus, if you should choose that honor." He looked down and continued filling out the form as he spoke.

"You may also," the clerk added, "elect to return Home on one of His Majesty's ships, provided you pay for the passage. The rate for that is--" He consulted a sheet of paper. "Oh, yes, here it is -- five thousand Units."

Trobar looked at the clerk. "The only money I have is back Home. It was being held for me in the University Treasury."

The clerk shook his head. "Oh, no. You have nothing there. It was all confiscated by the Emperor. To pay for your trial, and your transportation here."

All the rumors, then, were true. No matter what sentence had brought you here, it was a life sentence. None, or few, were those who could afford to pay their way back Home -- only those who had wealthy friends still in favor with the Emperor. Those were not likely to be here in the first place.

Trobar spread his empty hands before him. "Then I have no choice but to become a colonist," he said.

The clerk smiled again, and he also spread empty hands. "You are again a free subject of the Emperor. You may go where you want, if you have the means to get there. We will not force you to become a colonist."

"Then my only other choice is to become a freebooter."

The clerk slid a sheet of paper across to him. "That choice is yours. Please

indicate what course of action you choose, and sign. After that, you are free to go. Your debt to the Emperor has been satisfied."

He looked out the window again. A haze of evaporating water that obscured the base of the mountains and a faint streak of green growth showed where the efforts of the prison workforce were beginning to bear fruit. That was the visible result of his own work. He looked down at his hands. They were scarred and calloused from the labor of the last five years. He could almost tell when each scar had been made. Previously, the hardest work his hands had known was the turning of pages of ancient manuscripts. But everything he had done at the University was meaningless. Now, it was only the labor that these hands had done that had any reality. Everything else had been obliterated because he had gone to the wrong meeting.

He ran the pen down the lines on the page. Tears came to his eyes when he checked the entry that read I accept the kind invitation of His Most August Majesty Chankrondor XXV to become a Citizen Colonist on the Colony World of T'arnp'ur. His fingers were shaking so much that his signature wasn't even legible.

The Emperor Chankrondor IV, when released from imprisonment, had returned to his summer palace. There it was that the usurper Krandpot phi and his highest ranking followers were being held in the deepest subdungeon by the commander of the loyalist troops, who had fought for the freedom of the Emperor. To show the fate of traitors, the Emperor had the River p'Er diverted so that it ran through the subdungeon. Then, for his loyalty, the Emperor elevated the commander to the rank of Viceroy and bestowed the palace upon him and his heirs in perpetuity. Trobar p'Arvellhion knew that he had no such royal powers, but he indulged himself for some little time in fantasies of what would happen if such powers were his.

There were fifty of them being outprocessed today from this particular prison compound. They walked out through metal fences, between rows of slitwire, past guards who held their silver slug-guns high. Each of the former prisoners wore a new suit of black cloth that had been supplied from the personal treasury of the Emperor. Already the suits were covered with a thin layer of red dust, the relentless gift of the desert to each of them. Trobar wondered how the Emperor Chankrondor IV had felt as he left his imprisonment. His eyes were caught by the eyes of the prisoners still inside, who stood against the metal fence, dressed in gray fatigues that were streaked with red. With their fingers caught in the meshes of the fence, they looked hungrily at the fifty men who trooped quietly to the waiting bus. They had worked hard all day out in the red waste. They waited for the dinner call, but were riveted now by this sight of former companions being taken to freedom.

Trobar could not look away from them even when he entered the bus. He found a window seat, and kept his face pressed against the plastic as they drove away. A few of the prisoners raised their arms to wave farewell, and Trobar waved back, though he knew they could not see. He himself had pressed against that fence, many times, watching the freedmen leaving, hoping that they were going Home as

someday he would go Home, fearing that they were not.

The bus drove out past the landing field where the transport ships waited. They had come from Home, laden with supplies and new prisoners. Those who were released were replaced, then forgotten. The ships would leave, carrying produce and ores that had been transported hundreds and thousands of miles across the desert. No longer silver, but the same dull pink as the sky, the ships caught the last light of the Star. Soon, it would be night.

Trobar supposed that he would have to stop calling it the Star, now that he was a colonist. The prisoners all called it the Star, because the Sun was the fire that blazed in the skies of Home. But he would never see Home again. The bus was taking him farther away from Home than he had ever been before, to a colony settlement to the north. This planet, the Colony World of T'arnp'ur, was now home, and the Star was now the sun.

The driver of the bus was an old colonist. He told them stories as the night rose around them. In the darkness, the mountains and the horizon, and even the prison itself--everything fell away from them, leaving them in infinite space. The road led from nowhere to nowhere. Only the voice of the driver gave them something familiar to cling to. He had been transported fifty years ago, as a young man. Back then, when the colony was new, the prison sentences had been longer. He had served fifteen years before being allowed to join the colony.

"Not that the work was any easier," he said. "You couldn't tell the difference between prisoner and colonist by the amount of work done. You still can't. The work is hard, no matter which you are. For that matter, you might as well be a prisoner, for prisoners are fed even in the midst of famine, but as a colonist you've earned the right to starve along with the rest. Of course, you're given a quadrant of ground, and when you marry your wife's quadrant is joined to that and a third is thrown in as a bonus, and you get another quadrant bonus for each child born. There's some consolation in that -- wife and children to come home to after a hard day in the fields."

At the mention of marriage, the humor of the men began to pick up. They began to tell stories, make ribald jokes among themselves.

The old man laughed at them. "Hold yourselves together, for there'll be enough time for that. There's to be a Choosing when you arrive. You've not heard of that? You hear all the bad rumors, but not the good ones. Well, when new colonists come into a region, there's a festival. It's partly a leftover celebration of convicts rejoicing in one another's good fortune. But it's more than that now. All the Families bring out their sons and daughters, widows and widowers, and marriages are made. You don't have to, you know. You're free citizens, under the Emperor's bounty, and you can work your quadrant alone, if you so wish. But remember, wealth is power, here as it is anywhere, and here on T'arnp'ur, land is wealth. You're best off adding your quadrant in with a Family that's accumulated much already. Many quadrants and many hands to work them. That's the way to increase your wealth."

As the old man drove and talked, his voice slowly seeped into the bones of the freedmen, and soon they began to talk. In prison, they had always been furtive, as if they wanted to shield each other from the shame of being there. But now they began to talk of where they were from and what had brought them there. One was from Gwar, another from Locus, yet a third from Far Krelling. One had been sent for murder, another for insurrection, and a third for stealing a loaf of bread. They spoke of friends and family, wives and lovers, wealth and poverty, dreams and delusions, all left behind now, for best or worst.

One tall fellow, still just a boy, told how he had splashed paint all over the Emperor's portrait and been chased by the police for nearly two leagues before he was caught. "It was just a lark," he said. "I didn't mean nothing by it. My dad and me, we always stood up for the Emperor on Parade Day. He always said to me, 'Chengo, always praise the Emperor and give him honor.' It was just for fun. I didn't mean nothing by it."

The talk came to Trobar. Eyes turned to him, and he said, "I was an Historian at the Imperial University, in the Capitol. I specialized in the reign of Chankrondor IV. I had tenure. I could have become a Professor. But I was arrested for not knowing what kind of meeting I went to. Did I tell you that I had tenure?"

Everyone laughed at that, and Trobar did not feel particularly foolish, for if any of them had been wise they would not be here.

The Emperor Chankrondor IV, when released from imprisonment, had set to work reforming the administration of Law. He had established the Penal Colony system that had caused his Empire to grow in size and wealth, and had been able to pass his bounty down through his descendants, so that now the Emperor Chankrondor XXV ruled not only over Home, but three other planets as well. Trobar p'Arvellhion once had thought this a great and good thing.

Now he did not know how to feel about it. He laid his head against the window of the bus, staring out at the night streaming by, trying to imagine how it might have been, if he had turned down Chenkor's offer, gone back to work on that article for the Royal Historical Journal instead. He had worked hard to receive tenure, and with that behind him, the way was open for a professorship. Surely he would have been married by now. There had been several ladies who had their eyes on him, waiting for the time when he could relax from his studies long enough to contemplate the next move in his career. The dean's daughter had been interested in him. He remembered her as having a bright and pretty face. Perhaps children would have come by now. He did not know the proper timing of these things, but he could imagine himself with children now. For some reason, as he thought about it, he pictured himself with a daughter, with long golden hair, clutching his hand as they walked across the campus together.

He fell asleep with that image in his mind, and a deep sense of loneliness and loss within his heart. The bus plunged on, farther and farther into the wilderness.

Trobar woke deep in the night. He had been dreaming of his work as a prisoner, moving dust, tending seedlings, setting plants out in rows, digging wells and laying irrigation pipe. Alone, he hoisted the pipe, dropped it, and stood watching as water came flowing out, spreading like a lake, and the red dust began to turn green. Thirsty, he lay down to drink, and then awoke with his head against the plastic of the window. The bus jerked and the engine roared suddenly as the driver began shifting down and braking to a stop. Ahead of them in the road was a light, like a single star fallen to earth, waving back and forth.

"It's freebooters, lads," the driver grumbled. "Just do as they say and we'll all be well."

Everyone was silent as a man with a hood motioned them out of the bus with the muzzle of his slug-gun. It was not bright and shiny like the guns of the guards, but rather rusty and dirty. It might not even be able to fire, but no one wanted to find out. These were men who had grown used to obedience and passivity. They did what they were told, sullenly but silently. The gun was, perhaps, not even necessary.

They stood shivering in the cold of the night, as five hooded figures walked up and down the line they had formed. None of them knew what to expect from the freebooters. They had heard rumors of them -- the proud, defiant ones who refused still to bow the knee to the Emperor, even after years of servitude, who refused the colonial offer and chose instead to roam the waste places of T'arnp'ur. How they lived, no one knew. Some, surely, roved as thieving bands. Others were said to have established their own settlements in canyons and valleys far from the colony settlements.

The man with the gun spoke loudly. "We're freebooters, men. No doubt you've heard of those like us. Don't be afraid of the hoods. We just wear them so you won't have to identify us during those times when we come to walk about in the colony. We're here to offer you a chance to join us. We won't take just any, but if you're what we need, we'll welcome you. We can't promise you much, yet, not even as much as the colony can -but we can promise that you'll never have to bow your knee to the emperor back on his dirt-ball. One day, after we've worked hard enough, we'll be able to kick him and his goons off this planet, and this'll be Home then. What do you say, men? You may think you're freedmen, but you're just trading slavery for slavery. Come with us, if you're what we need, and your children will be freeborn."

The four other freebooters walked along the line of men, talking with them, asking where they were from on Home, what they had done, and what they wanted now. One of them stopped in front of Trobar. "And what about you?" he said.

Trobar was eager to be wanted, to be needed. He had a sudden vision of himself with his knowledge helping to establish a new social order. "I'm Trobar p'Arvellhion, of the Imperial University in the Capitol. I had tenure. I'm an Historian, an expert on the reign of the Emperor Chankron --"

The man laughed. He turned and called out loudly to the leader, "Krate, this

one's a bloody historian."

The freebooters all laughed. Their laughter was infectious. The men who stood waiting under the gun, eager for any sign of goodwill on the part of their captors, joined in. Even Trobar felt himself giggle. He felt suddenly very foolish for being an Historian.

Krate, the leader, looked over at him, shaking his head. "I'm sorry for you, Historian. You've come to a place where there is no history."

The Emperor Chankrondor IV, when released from imprisonment, had returned to his Summer Palace and set things right there, and then had gone on to the Imperial Palace in the Capitol and had set about from there to make things right in all his domains. He began with the government of his own life and his own household, and extended that to the government of the Lords and Ladies under him, and the Governors of all his provinces, in the hopes that, beginning with himself, the good results would filter down to the level of the common people. In the last days of his life, he had written a book filled with much wisdom. Trobar p'Arvellhion had once known all that book almost by heart. Now he found that he had forgotten all but one line: "A man's history lies in his own hands; where he finds work for them is his home." He kept whispering it to himself, over and over, but he could no longer remember what it had meant to him.

He rode the rest of the way to the colony settlement with his head leaning against the plastic of a window. It felt like there was nothing left to him. Ten men had gone with the freebooters. Five more had turned them down. Trobar had not even been asked. Night began to turn to morning, and still he did not sleep. His brain was silent. He stared out over the emptiness that was revealed when the sun began to rise. Quadrant after quadrant of red dust and emptiness went by outside. It was only later, at the very outskirts of the settlement, that any green began to break the monotony. Prisoners had first worked this land, breaking the ground up, digging wells, laying pipe, so that the green plants might begin to grow. After them, the colonists had come, and were now extending the work the prisoners had begun. A colonist himself, he would take the work further.

The festival, the Choosing, had already begun when they arrived. There were a few administrative buildings in the center of the settlement, and the people had come in from their quadrants and set up tents 'round about. The tents were great black things, decorated with brilliant banners. Colorful decorations were everywhere.

It was late morning when the bus arrived. The men stumbled out, tired and hungry, shy, not sure what to do. They did not know the rules of this new place, did not know how to fit in. They stood around the bus, grouped together, like a herd of wild cattle. People of the settlement came, took their hands and led them to a tent where they might live for the duration of the festival, until they had found suitable Choosings or decided to go off and work their quadrants alone. There were bunks in the tent, and trunks to store any belongings they might have acquired. They were shown the sanitary and shower facilities.

It wasn't necessary to show them a place to eat. All about them was drink and food, song and dance. They were surrounded by a festival to celebrate their release, to celebrate fresh life come into the colony, to celebrate new hands to help with the work.

Their hosts withdrew, and the men stood about, not sure what to do. Then one by one, or in small groups, they began to exercise their freedom. Some went out from the tent and were swallowed up into the swirl of the Choosing, others chose to rest on their bunks. Trobar lay down, and fell asleep. When he woke, the day was beginning to fail again.

Trobar sat on his bunk for a long time, not sure what he should do. He was alone. It was just as well. He didn't belong here. He wasn't sure where he really belonged. He tried to remember his room at the University, but he could only see his cell in the prison. Finally Chengo, the boy who had splashed the Emperor's portrait with paint, wandered in. He went over to his trunk, and searched around in it. He found what he was looking for, a book of some kind, and started to leave again. Then he saw Trobar. He smiled broadly.

"Come on," he said. "It's time to enjoy yourself."

"I'm not sure --" Trobar mumbled, but Chengo grabbed his arm.

"Come on," he said again. "You're free now. You've got to celebrate."

He dragged Trobar, still protesting feebly, out of the prisoners' tent and into another. People looked up as they entered, and moved toward them. Plates of food and cups of liquor were pressed into their hands.

"It's this way everywhere you go," said Chengo. "No one leaves you alone."

Around them, the people began to talk and ask questions. Trobar tried to ask the boy what they should do now, but the crowd separated them.

Trobar soon lost track of where he went and what he did. He found himself wandering from tent to tent, eating and drinking and talking. People crowded about him. Young girls watched him with glistening eyes. Mature women stood close, expectant. He was given food and drink. He found himself talking, telling about his life on Home, about the University, about the Emperor Chankrondor IV, about his arrest and his life in prison. Time and again, people clustered around him. They were at first eager to hear, but then lost interest and faded away. He moved on, or was whisked away, to another tent, and the whole scene repeated itself there. He realized, after a time, that he was being examined by different Families, being tried and found lacking.

There were a few faces that he seemed to recognize as he went from tent to tent. It was as if they were following him about. There was the face of a woman that he saw again and again. He saw her in one tent, then another, then he lost sight of her. He saw some of the men from the prison, and he saw some freedwomen. A



bus had come from one of the women's prisons. Trobar saw them wandering around as dazed as the men, their hair shaved short.

Once again, he saw the face of the woman who had been following him. Surely just a coincidence, he thought. With such a party going on he was bound to run into the same people in more than one tent.

He started toward her, but music suddenly blared loud and a procession came through. Chengo marched at the head of it, dressed in a brilliant silver robe. A girl, younger even than himself, clutched one arm. Behind the couple came a band of people playing instruments, singing, dancing, throwing confetti and waving bright cloth in the air.

Chengo turned to Trobar as he went past. "I've been chosen," he shouted, and he clutched the arm of the girl tightly. She glanced quickly at Trobar, blushing and smiling and then they all vanished away.

Darkness closed down around him. Trobar found himself wandering in the night, alone. There had been some fun, at first, in being the center of attention, but that had faded as rejection had followed rejection. Now he felt like getting away from all fellowship. He didn't really seem to be connected with his body anymore. He shuffled and stumbled, unable to control his legs properly. Somewhere between two tents, surrounded by music and voices, he stopped. He felt a dark misery bubbling up from within. He sat down and began to weep drunkenly. The weeping felt good, like a warm blanket about him. He had forgotten how good it could feel to get stinking drunk, to let the black memory of what he had lost pour down over him like water, and to weep and weep for what could not be regained. He clutched his misery tightly about himself, warmed himself with it, then let it drop to the ground as he drifted into sleep.

He woke before dawn with a sick feeling in his stomach and a pain in his head. There was just enough light to show that he was lying outside a tent, curled up on the ground. Someone had been kind enough to place a blanket over him. Rolling over on his back, he looked up at the sky. It was bright with lights. Sick, lonely, empty, he felt like a rock falling forever between those stars. He didn't know which one was Home. Maybe there was no Home. He had been rejected by all. The freebooters did not need him, and none in the colony seemed to want him. He did not know how long the Choosing would last, but he felt that he might wander through it until the end and not find any who needed a man who knew all about the Emperor Chankrondor IV, dead and dust nearly three thousand years now.

He started to rise, and felt pain shoot through his head. He clutched it with his hands and moaned.

A child's voice spoke from behind him. "Mommy said that when you woke up I should give you this."

Startled, he turned, and the pain made him moan again. The child came to him, and held an earthen flask to his lips. He tasted something that was sweet and bitter both.

"Mommy says to drink it all."

He took the flask in his hands and drank it all down. The taste made him shudder, but it eased the sickness in his stomach almost at once.

"Mommy has me take it when I'm sick," said the child. "I think it tastes dreadful."

"Yes, it does," said Trobar. "Medicine often tastes dreadful."

The child was a girl. He was not good at guessing children's ages. She couldn't be much more than eight. Her hair was very blonde, and her eyes very blue. She gazed thoughtfully at him, as if he were some kind of animal she had never seen before. She seemed very much at ease with him, as if she didn't really know that he was a stranger.

"Mommy will be back soon," she said. "You were snoring while you slept. My name is Perr."

"My name is Trobar."

"We came from North Vale. Where did you come from, Trobar?"

He looked up at the sky. "I think I fell from one of those stars," he said. "I'm not sure which one. It was a long time ago, and I forgot to look while I was falling. I fell from a place called Home."

She giggled at that. "Home isn't up there, it's that way." She pointed out toward one of the horizons. "We'll be going home, in a few days, after the Choosing is over. Are you going home then?"

Trobar shrugged. "I'm not sure anymore where Home is."

Perr smiled. "I know where my home is." She looked past Trobar's shoulder and her smile grew broader. "Here's Mommy now."

Trobar turned to look. There was just enough light to see her as she made her way past the tents. He had seen her before. She was wrapped in a light blanket. Long, dark hair fell softly around her face and over her shoulders. Her eyes were dark in the fresh morning. He could not tell if she were young or old. She stopped, looking down at the man and the child. He could see her smile in the semidarkness.

Trobar stood, uneasy. He wasn't sure what to do with his hands. He clutched them behind his back.

"I saw you in several of the tents, last night," he said. "Who are

"I am Anto p'Reth. How are you feeling?"

"Better. That remedy seems to have helped. I am Trobar p'Arvellhion."

"I know. You had tenure with the Imperial University, and were an expert on an early Emperor. I forget which one."

"Chankrondor IV," said Trobar.

"Yes, Chankrondor IV. I've never learned about him. We know nothing here, except which crops to rotate in next, and how to find water where the sand is dark. I tried to follow you last night. I saw you in the tent of the p'Tanth Family. Like you said, we almost met in several tents. Then you disappeared, and I thought I had lost you. I found you sleeping here, almost by accident. I would have led you to a more comfortable bed, but you were asleep, and we're too far from my Family's tent. I couldn't carry you by myself, and I didn't want to disturb anyone else with the task, but I brought a blanket to help keep you warm. I've been making breakfast for you, while Perr kept watch."

"Thank you for the kindness. Why did you bother?"

She smiled again. "Historians are dense, aren't they. I didn't want to lose you so soon. It's in my mind to choose you, for myself, for Perr, for my Family. If you will have us. If you will have me."

Trobar gave a laugh. "I don't understand. Why would you want me? I know all about Chankrondor IV, but little else that's useful. I have been made to work these last five years, but I'm still not strong. I can give you children I suppose, and another quadrant, but there must be others who can do the same. What do you --"

She reached over and put a finger to his lips. "Hush," she said. "You protest too much. My Family is large and wealthy. We have many quadrants and many children and many hands to work. I am a widow; I have Perr. What I need, what my Family needs, is not the same as one just starting out. Our domains and numbers will increase, as they always have, but we need more than that."

She looked up at the sky, where all the stars moved silently.

"I want you to tell me about the Emperor, and about the others who sleep in the dust back on the world they called Home. I want you to tell me where we came from, and how we got here. I want you to tell me, and Perr, and all of our Family's children. And I want you to listen to the stories we tell you, so you can start weaving them together into stories that will pass down from us to our children and to the children of our children's children when we in our turn sleep in the dust."

The Emperor Chankrondor IV, when released from imprisonment -but Trobar p'Arvellhion had forgotten, for the moment, what the Emperor had done.

He stood there in the predawn darkness, beside the woman and the child,

underneath a sky full of stars that he had not been born to. Everything was very still, even the wind. He could almost believe that everything had been frozen like this since the world began, everything waiting for something to happen, so time could start moving again. The planet itself was stuck on its axis, and the Star refused to move any closer to day.

Trobar looked out past the tents that squatted on the red plain like great sleeping beasts. He looked out past the horizon. He could not see it, but he was able to look out over the road the bus had traveled, and out past the prison, to a field where bright silver ships waited to fly on stardust and fire to another planet that circled a distant star, a planet that the people who dwelt there called Home.

Once, Trobar had known everything there was to know about a man named Chankrondor who had lived on that planet. That had been a long time ago. Now, it seemed, he knew nothing. He held his hands up before him and studied once more the scars and calluses, the lines and cracks. Everything -- all of Chankrondor's history, and all of his own history -it had all been taken away from him, by a foolish chance. But that was only a seeming, for he knew now that the Emperor had been right. His history was in his hands, and had been for the last five years. He had been making it as his hands had helped to shape this new world.

He dropped his hands, and with that gesture, time became unstuck and everything began to move again. The Star -- no, the sun -- began to poke above the horizon. Perr took one of his hands, and Anto took the other. They began walking side by side through the tents of the Choosing. Men and women were moving about, preparing for the day's festivities. Children were starting to run and play. Perr was talking, telling him about home, about her room, about the land and the crops and the animals. She talked about her grandmother and grandfather, and the aunts and uncles and cousins, and all the people of her Family. Trobar had yet no word for the relationships she felt, but she had many, and spoke of them dearly. With her voice, she wove a tapestry. As her words fell about him, Trobar felt himself woven into that tapestry, one small thread, together with skein after skein of other threads, all coming together into a whole that no one could see yet.

He had come to a place that was different from any he could have ever imagined. The freebooter had been right. This was a place where there was no history.

But there would be. It had already begun.