

Chapter 2: *'You build on up, don't break the chain. Sparks will fly, when the whistle blows. Fire burns, heart beats strong. Sing out loud, the chain gang song'* Grace Jones (Horn T, Woolley, BM, et al 1985)

'Mars?! Mars?! Fucking Mars?! The planet Mars?!', Peppard exploded at the others in Anwar's office. Apart from these two there were two military types in uniform, and one resolute looking non-uniformed man, all sitting around Anwar's enormous desk. Peppard was seated and locked into the prisoner chair beyond the desk, and despite the restraints, he was leaning forward, face reddened and veins bulging in his muscular neck. 'Yes, you heard correctly, Peppard, the planet Mars. Away from this one,' Anwar replied, an amused tone betraying his continued enjoyment of the prisoner's predicament.

'Mr Peppard, if you are part of this mission, you will be considered a free man following completion of its objectives,' the resolute man stated, 'of course, you'll remain on Mars, there is no returning to Earth, but you'll be a founding citizen of the first colony. *A fresh start.*' And the resolute man stared at Peppard intently, while also keeping an eye on Anwar, too. '*Get utterly fucked, government!*', roared the restrained man. The military types shifted uncomfortably in their seats at this ill discipline. 'You have the right personality profile, background and skills, if not temperament, with no living relatives, and you're a lifer, Mr Peppard,' 'Government' said gently, 'you have nothing to lose and everything to gain.'

Peppard stared back at Government, giving himself time to think fast while he studied him and the military types. He knew Anwar was a prize prick already. Turning over the proposal, which is probably non-negotiable anyway, he considered options. Nothing came to mind. 'And what if I say no?', he ventured. Government looked straight back at him, poker face on, 'Oh, I'm deeply sorry, Mr Peppard, there are no options here, perhaps I was not clear enough. Stay and your sentence will be commuted to death, or be part of the mission with your fellow lifers.' Anwar could not help a small snigger escape his mouth. All present ignored him. Peppard felt ironically validated by Government's response. No options. 'Fellow lifers?', was Peppard's short reply. 'Yes, approximately 150 from this establishment, plus some technicians, scientists, and a contingent of marines with a few prison staff,' outlined Government. Anwar was the next to shift uncomfortably under the resolute man's steely gaze as he mentioned prison staff.

Government must have been reading Peppard's next question, 'and all have a one way journey, all have transgressed laws in some way and are either already in prison or would be if it wasn't for this mission.' Peppard nodded, 'and what are these objectives?', he probed further. 'Simple, really, one, survive, two, initiate terraforming, and three, set the foundation for expansive colonisation, or four, die trying,' Government outlined flatly, but with just the slightest flicker to the corner of his mouth, displaying some amusement of his own. For Peppard this worried him even further, as Government was clearly a sociopath. He looked towards Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum in their uniforms, but they remained impassive, silent observers to the interchange. 'Well, as I haven't won the off planet cruise with spending money thrown in, I don't appear to have much of a choice, do I?', Peppard asserted. 'Mr Peppard, be under no illusions, you have *no* choices,' Government reiterated, with a very cold expression.

Prison Governor Anwar pushed a button on his desk to summon some guards to escort Peppard back to his cell, temporarily this time, before his final departure. He relished that thought, he fucking hated the sight of him. Three guards appeared and took hold of Peppard. 'I wish you every success, Mr Peppard, and oh, you'll not be the only cybernetised individual on this mission, be assured,' Government said somewhat enigmatically. Just as he was hauled from the room Government turned to Anwar, 'we know about many of your *transgressions*, too, Governor, and as there is a vacancy for an administrator on Mars, you will be pleased to know you've been selected.' Only then did the military types stand up and move, forcibly holding Anwar by each arm, who was blustering and looking extremely nauseous. He could hear Peppard laughing his head off as he was hauled from his office all the way to his cell.