

Coming Soon...

# STOLEN LIVES

SCION: BOOK TWO

Michael J. Allen



Delirious  
Scribbles Ink

Delirious Scribbles Ink



# Desperate for a Friend

Alaric raised his hands in surrender. The breathing mask pinching his ears muffled his voice. “This is a legal transaction.”

The four traders – an Elcu, two umoid and a rilduron – dove for cover between towering heaps of space wreckage. They further complicated their late arrival by opening fire on the approaching Scrics authorities.

“You betrayed us, Ignaree,” The rilduron's accusations carried on a biting wind. “We'll remember you for this.”

“It wasn't me, Shtephe, I swear,” Alaric said.

Vibrant orange spikes peaked up, an ear-to-ear bridge of cartilage cutting through them identified the trader's species as Ongali. He glowered at Alaric, shoved the credit stick Alaric'd just handed over into a belt and fired.

Alaric dove for cover as armored security men returned fire. The lighter gravity of Jerol – Scrics Five's moon – turned his dive into a glide that overshot his cover.

*Damn it. What else can go wrong?*

He scrambled behind twisted wreckage once vehicles for peoples' dreams. The corner nearest his head exploded, plinking garbage off his mask and bombarding his fighter pilot jacket with debris.

He swore. *I can't replace some of those campaign patches.*

An amplified voice filled the night. “I say again, this is Scrics System Security. Surrender immediately.”

“I tried that,” Alaric shouted. “You shot at me.”

Two pulsewave scatter guns floated along the amorphous curves of the magenta Elcu accompanying Shtephe. The ovoid blob spluttered and hissed battle cries as cyan energy guns launched from its weapons by the pseudopodful.

Alaric's comm ring crackled to life with an oddly chord like voice. "What is happening?"

"Little busy here, Tsin," Alaric peaked around the debris. He ducked back as Shtephe blasted his cover.

"You're surrounded," Tsin said.

*Tell me something I don't know.*

Shtephe and his three companions traded blasts with S<sup>3</sup>. The headless, waxy-leaved tangle of vines fired at him.

"Just a case of mistaken identity," Alaric said. "They think I'm some kind of pirate."

"You're under fire?" Tsin asked. "Corollas besiege you?"

"System Security," Alaric unholstered his blaster. He reconsidered, slamming it home once more.

Tsin's outrage carried on three words. "This is illegal?"

"No, it's mostly a misunderstanding." Alaric shot a glance at the AI module in the Ongali's other hand – the only even vaguely florentine-compatible module he'd managed to track down. "Wait, Corollas? Here?"

"Yes. They're surrounding you."

*How the hedrin did they find me already?* Alaric fogged his mask with profanities. "Get clear of the junkyard and lay low."

"Get clear where?" Tsin asked. "It covers Jerol."

Shtephe's rifleman screamed.

"Figure it out." Alaric chanced a look. "I'll be in touch."

The vanilla umoid clutched a cauterized stump that had been a shoulder moments before.

*Lucky thing about energy weapons I guess.*

*<Real lucky. How about you leap out and try it for yourself, runt?>*

The Elcu flattened itself fist-high and oozed over to the downed rifleman. It dragged him back as S<sup>3</sup> rushed their position.

Alaric tossed a hunk of garbage toward Shtephe. He shot the debris out of the air and aimed at Alaric.

"Wait," Alaric whispered. "I'll surrender to them as a distraction, you run, just leave me the module."

Shtephe fired.

Alaric's cover disintegrated, forcing another dive for more. "You've been paid."

"Doubtless blank, typical turncoat precaution, betrayer."

Alaric bristled. "I didn't betray you."

Shtephe's answer filled the air with high speed but slowly falling shrapnel.

*Think.* He peaked around a cover for a look at the Scrics authorities. Shtephe and S<sup>3</sup> sent Alaric deeper into the starship graveyard. He took cover behind a

severed vultair wing. Their assault drove the Ongali and his purchased module closer to him.

*What I wouldn't give to see Cassii fly down and scoop me off to safety.* His gut churned.

Cassii, the AI that'd saved him from Welorin-invaded Earth was gone – stolen. He eyed the module again. *Without it, I'll never get her back. Without her, I'll never save El or Jesse.*

He scanned the wreckage labyrinth. Figures moved atop the surrounding debris piles getting into position to snipe them. *Corollas or S<sup>3</sup>?*

He chewed his lip.

*If I keep my head down and surrender, they can prove my blasters weren't fired.* His gaze fixed on the module. *But I lose the only workable AI module in Scrics.*

He checked the battlefield and its skyline of mounded debris once more.

*Where's that Elcu?*

His brain caught up, recognizing the vultair wing under his fingertips. He dropped low and checked its underside. Hope swelled.

He yanked at the wing. It stuck fast. He pulled, giving Shtephe his head as target. The shot drove Alaric down. He cursed the rilduron, twice cursed the wedged wing, and thrice cursed the hell guaranteed by his plan.

He unholstered his blaster and fired it. *Not like the crooked bastards are going to hold me blameless after this anyway.*

It took several shots and a lot of wiggling, but he coerced the wing from its nest and flipped it over. He'd only brought a few tools to test the module, but it wasn't like he could go shopping while under fire. He made it work.

He stripped the fuel cells from both his blaster pistols, yanked wires from some piece of junk, and jury rigged them to the photon bolt launcher still attached to the bent wing. He hesitated, the last wire hovering just off the weapon.

*It's either going to keep firing until it runs out of juice or blow up in my face.*

He positioned the wing to assault canyon walls of mounded junk between him, S<sup>3</sup> and Shtephe.

*Sure hope I'm due a little luck.*

He touched the wire to the launcher. A hum rose. Sparks shot out of its sides. *Guess not, I'll--*

A blazing blue-white sphere of photons shot out of the cannon. Junk piles exploded, raining down sharp-edged chunks of broken dreams.

A glance showed him the Ongali's widened eyes and the rilduron's baffled arrangement of leaves.

Alaric touched the wire to the firing point once more and wedged it there with another wire. The launcher didn't take as long to warm up. It lobbed photon bolts one after another, bringing down an avalanche of destruction.

Alaric rushed the startled Ongali, slamming a fist into his jaw. "Sorry about this."

He snatched up the module and fled.

A yelp brought his attention back to the Ongali. Debris cut into the man's leg. Alaric cursed himself and rushed back to the injured man. He checked the bleeding and broken limb. *He'll bleed out before they get to him.*

The photon bolt launcher spat its last round.

He pulled the fighting batons from his belt, ripped the Ongali's pant leg off and wrapped it around the wound and makeshift splint.

"We know your name," the Ongali growled. "We'll get you for this."

*My name?* Alaric's eyes fell to the credit strip in the Ongali's belt. *If S<sup>3</sup> doesn't know who I am, that'll tell them.*

"Can you walk?" Alaric asked.

"Not that I'd go anywhere with you, but no."

*<Do it, kid.>*

The shock of Manc Shepherd's voice in his thoughts brought him up short. "What?"

"No, I can't walk."

Alaric chewed his lip. "I'll contact you later to pay for the module."

The Ongali blinked at him.

"Sorry about this, too." Alaric brought the Ongali's discarded weapon down on his head with a sympathetic cringe. He snatched the credit strip and bolted.

The Elcu oozed out of a debris pile to block his path.