

# The Sword Review

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*Fantasy, Science Fiction & More*

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**Featuring:**

**The Blue Flower** by Donald Jacob Uitvlugt  
*Honorable Mention, 2006 Fiction Contest*

# The Blue Flower

*Donald Jacob Uitvlugt*

**D**av Benari clung by his fingertips to the edge of the ledge. He hadn't expected the Guard to find him so easily. But that was the third scout ship to fly by, and Pyrrha IV was supposed to be a quarantined planet. He trusted his cloak to blend in with the brown of the rock and hoped that the ship didn't have infrared sensors. When it flew past, he continued to climb.

He was panting by the time he reached the top of the mountain, his breath whistling through the breather he wore, just in case. Pyrrha IV was close to terranorm—strikingly close, in fact—but it was best to take precautions against pathogens.

The vegetation on top of the peak was sparser than the lush jungle in the foothills below, but there still was a surprising variety of plants and mosses. Benari felt his booted feet sink slightly into the springy undergrowth. Like cushions under his feet. But he wasn't here for his health. He needed to find what he was looking for before one of the scout ships came back.

There. He held his breath for a moment, just staring. A blue flower, so striking amid the brown and green. The thin petals with their lighter blue tips burst out from the darker blue center. Like the birth of a star had been captured and shrunk down to comprehensible size. But no less beautiful. And the aroma, like violets and lavender, and something Benari couldn't name.

He shook off the spell. He had no time for delay. He carefully dug through the moss around the base of the plant, and placed it, soil, plant, and flower, into a specimen sphere. He sealed the sphere and tucked it into his

tunic. Motion on the horizon caught his eye. It was one of the scout ships. He had gotten what he had come for. He called for his ship.

As his one-man cruiser appeared from the jungle below, the scout swung in his direction. By the time he had jumped to the hatch ladder, the scout was almost upon him, and two more ships were coming up fast. But they were too late. There was no way Mel was going to allow a scout ship to catch her.

"Are you, Mel?" Benari said out loud as he climbed into the pilot's chair and fastened his harness.

"Am I what?" The ship's Voice spoke in a soothing alto, with only the slightest hint of its artificial origin. "Are you referring to our company outside?"

"Yes. You can outrun them, yes?"

Mel made an annoyed sound. "With one thruster behind my back. Once we're in open space, that is."

"Well, let's get going then. We have a long journey ahead of us."

The Guard ships were hailing him, but Benari couldn't hear what was being said over the sound of Mel's thrusters. He pressed back into the chair until they had escaped Pyrrha IV's gravity. They escaped before the scouts could even get a shot off. The weightlessness of space. Home. The only home Benari had known for almost twenty years.

"Heading, Dav?"

"Get us far enough from the planet so we can slip Between. Then lay in a heading for Ecumene Prime."

Benari could have sworn he heard Mel sigh. "Are you sure I can't talk you out of this plan? You could get yourself killed, and me along with it."

Benari licked his lips. "I have to, Mel. It's my destiny. And no drugs. I need to be fully aware when we arrive."

The lights on the console flickered like Mel was going to say something, but Benari only heard the sound of the shiftdrive powering up. Benari took the specimen sphere out of his tunic and placed it into the clear plastisteel case that had been prepared for it. He stared at the flower again, the blue seeming to glow from the light in the case. "My destiny," he whispered, and then spoke out loud to Mel. "Slip when ready."

"Aye, aye. And the Powers protect us."

Before Benari could respond to Mel's remark the cruiser folded in on itself and entered *Between*space, a curled up set of dimensions where normal spacetime limits did not apply. Benari felt his vision blur, but did not regret his decision to turn down the drugs. The human brain could not really perceive the hypergeometry of *Between*space, but the brain did its best to process the stimuli it received anyway.

This usually led to nausea, and often to hallucinations. The nausea Benari had gotten used to, but he never could be quite sure what he was going to see. Today it seemed he was going to be treated to highlights from his past, memories flitting past him like images from a speeded up dream.

He saw himself when he was a child, not Dav Benari, but Daud 7543, living with his brother, Yusif 8729, in a barrack in the fifty-third children's ward on *Ecumene Prime*. He saw the factory where he worked for the Company, since he didn't have a family to support him. He saw himself traveling to work and back to the barracks on the moving walkways, his world colored grey by the ever-twilight of *Ecumene Prime*.

Then came the day his brother had been summoned to fight in one of the Company's wars. Daud 7543 looked up at the sky a lot then as he rode

the walkways, wondering why he had never looked at the sky before. Wondering why he had accepted living day-to-day, with no day different than the last.

He had decided that that would change. And so he did not go to work one day, taking the walkways to the nearest spaceport instead. By mingling with one of the dock gangs, he was actually able to sneak aboard an outgoing food transport. They were already in deep space before they noticed the extra oxygen consumption. An infrared scan tracked him down.

Oxygen was not free, and as the Company watched every credit, the ship could not put up with stowaways. Daud 7543 was put into an escape pod with enough food for seven days. He wept as the transport left, not because he was about to die, but because he had never seen the stars before that day.

They were so beautiful.

The Order found him in the pod on the eighth day. They had taken him in, healed him, given him new life, and in so doing, new purpose. The Order lived outside the confines of Company rules, trying to lift the spirits of all humans to the reality of higher powers beyond mere economy. They started with themselves.

Daud took to the teachings of the Order quickly, shaving his head and taking a new name. He had received the cloak of an initiate before his eighteenth birthday. This year he would become a master, once he had completed his quest.

Benari saw himself as he approached the Oracle's cave in the Parnassus system. He had fasted for a week, purifying himself for this encounter. The Oracle had spoken in hissing words. "You will find your destiny when you bring the Blue Flower to your homeworld."

It had taken months of research to track down the Blue Flower of Pyrrha IV, and a further month to plan his way in and out of the quarantine. But it had been worth it. Benari looked at the flower, the effects of Between-space making it seem even lovelier. Heartachingly lovely.

Ecumene Prime was a world-city, all glass and plastisteel, the home of the Company and its rule. There was nothing like this Flower there. Oh, there were green spaces, carefully cultivated to refresh the spirits of the workers just enough that they would work all the harder next cycle. But nothing like the wild beauty of the Blue Flower. Benari wondered if that was why Pyrrha IV had been quarantined.

He knew that if the right people beheld the flower, if enough people saw its beauty, they would start to question the way the Company controlled their lives. A small space would be created in their lives, where they could begin to be free.

"Coming on Ecumene Prime." Mel's voice was fuzzy in Benari's ears, like it was coming from a great distance. "Shifting to normal space...now."

A rainbow burst in front of Benari's eyes. He felt for the nav controls while he waited for his sight to adjust, his mind still swimming from the assault of memories. "Try to bring us in on an oblique angle to the shipping lanes. With any luck, we can be almost on them before they—"

"Unknown vessel, you are in Ecumene Prime space, in violation of the laws of the Intergalactic Corporation." The message droned over the speaker. A Guard cruiser, with another on the way. "Power down your engines, and prepare to be boarded. I repeat, unknown vessel, you are in Ecumene Prime space—"

"Can we outrun them? All we have to do is put down on the planet somewhere."

"I can outrun anything among the stars, Dav. Whether I can avoid the autodefense system, that's another question."

"One way to find out. Take us in, Mel."

"My luck to be paired with one of the really crazy ones." Dav chuckled and patted the console.

They were deep in the system before the Guard ships had time to react. Using the slower moving freighters for cover, Mel weaved them in and out of the traffic lanes. The Guards got off shots when they could, but didn't seem to want to risk damaging the Company's cargo. They had five cruisers in pursuit, and a couple of destroyers on their sensors. But they were going to make it.

"Coming up on the outer defensive line." The ship shook, and Benari could hear the hiss of fire suppression systems kicking in. "Mel, are we okay?"

"Everything's fine, Dav. Now shut up and let me fl—"

The ship rocked again, sparks coming from the nav console. "Mel? Mel! Speak to me! Ship, status!"

There was no answer. Benari felt his stomach churning, and it had nothing to do with the fact that his ship was spiraling towards the planet, out of control. He disengaged the autodrives, gripping the controls as he tried to turn the spin into a controlled descent. His cruiser was almost in the atmosphere now, and he trusted that the breaking thrusters still worked.

Just as he was about to fire them, a blast from one of the defensive line's plasma cannons caught them amidships. As the ship caught fire, Benari just had time to stare at the Blue Flower, asking the Powers why. And then the ship exploded...



Abbas 9352 looked up into the ever-twilight of the Ecumene Prime sky. Had he seen something? Suddenly there was a burst of color, and a far off sound. It was like a giant flower had suddenly bloomed into being within the grey dome of his world. He wondered why he had never looked up into the sky before. A longing sprung up in his heart, something awakening that had always been there but he had never realized before now. He turned to the people nearest to him on the moving walkway. They were looking up too, even pointing. Had something woken in them too?

Abbas 9352 did not know. But he did know that he would never forget the Blue Flower he had seen in the sky.



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This is Donald's first appearance in *The Sword Review*. Hopefully, it won't be his last.



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Specializing in colored pencil works on fiber-enhanced paper, more of the work of Michelle J.A. McIntyre can be found on her Webpage, < [www.fantasyrealmcreations.com](http://www.fantasyrealmcreations.com) >. She creates a variety of fantasy art subject matter including dragons, unicorns, gryphons, fairies, and centaurs.



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