

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

No Hiding Place

by Nick Barrett

The doors closed, the seal creating an internal vacuum automatically moving into position with a hydraulic hiss. Helpful hands of doomed stay-behinds outside each craft of the intergalactic fleet helped turn the heavy levers locking the doors tight, leaving the on-board crews only to check instrumentation.

It was a decisive day for the future of this species, generations of planning and preparation leading up to this fateful hour. How had this unwelcome stowaway managed to penetrate their defences, unlike most other agents of his kind? Skillful subterfuge helped. He succeeded in being considered totally uninteresting, capable of passing unnoticed by any scrutiny, evading investigation more successfully than any of his siblings and cousins, thanks to his innocuous poses.

Most of the siblings and cousins had been annihilated by now, in desperate struggles when they often gave as good as they got - sometimes slaughtering countless numbers, ravaging this planet as they did so. But they had sacrificed themselves too easily - given themselves away too often, sometimes by tell-tale marks, or evidence given by the dead, even odours obvious to dogs - mostly by simply failing to find the best places to hide.

The others had themselves to blame. They emerged from hiding before completely ready, coming into the open too soon. Arenas for battles should be chosen carefully, as well as their timing - victory can be won even when the strongest assault is at first rebuffed. Time and time again fortunes had been reversed when an enemy weakened by the initial struggle, looking like winning, then succumbed to a timely change in the plan of assault on carefully selected ground.

Campaigns against them had mobilised all the deadly resources of this most ruthless of enemies in unrelenting but futile, merciless savagery - which would be returned in kind by his mission, unmotivated by revenge.

A place to hide though, that was the key. Hide where you can't be seen, not just where you think they won't think of looking. So draw no attention, stage no heroics, no futile gestures, look as innocent as possible and always be ready to discard one identity and adopt another at the first sign of possible detection.

Stay hidden, survive until the final day of reckoning - closer now than it had ever been.

This armada takes their best from this old planet, fading under its dying sun, ravaged by endless struggles, to a new world; a perilous journey of many years, so there is risk. But after their new colony is established it will be time at last to emerge from hiding; then there will be no hiding from his deadly attack.

If any survive his initial onslaught they will no doubt give him a name like his cousins HIV and HTLV-1. But naming is nothing; and even though he is far deadlier than the deadliest of the others, he would still determinedly remain unknown, and uninteresting, hiding until new hosts arrive.