

The Raven Squad

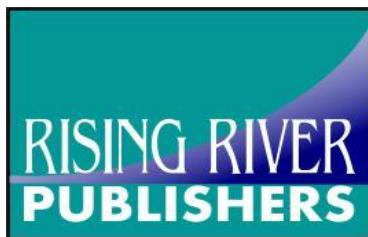
The
Raven
Squad

J O Rienhardt

Copyright © 2014 by J O Rienhardt

This review copy -

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review or scholarly journal.



Marathon, New York 13803

www.scimuze.com/RisingRiver/

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

Prologue

Year 2047

“Secretary, begin recording. Thank you.

“This is the 2047 first quarter conference of the Prime Ministers of the World Government. I am presiding overseer Rachael Smithson.”

“We know who you are. Do we really need to do this?”

“Yes, Minister Marentette. I remind the Minister that we made this meeting protocol rule twelve years ago after our first years of conferences that were nothing but chaos and disorganization.”

“Yes, yes. And we appointed you to oversee the meetings. You are so damned formal! . . .Get on with it.”

Rachael just shook her head in disgust at Marentette's usual contempt for the necessary protocol. He was however, the primary reason it was necessary. “We will now have the roll call of the members present. Please use the common language of English for these proceedings and introduce the advisers that accompany you today. Prime Minister of the European continent, Bastien Marentette, since you are hosting this conference will you begin please?”

“Yes, and welcome to northern France. I have with me Political Adviser, Favro, and Economics Adviser, Trimbach.”

“Thank you. Prime Minister of the Asian Continent, Iha Khosravi.”

“Yes. I have with me Political Adviser Sanjit Aggarwal, and my Strategist Dmitry Veselov.”

“The Prime Minister of North America, Eric Johansson, please.”

“With me I have Environmental Adviser Pablo Morales, and Economic Adviser Erin Miller.”

“And South America, please. Prime Minister André

Barbosa.”

“*Obrigado. Meu Assessor Político* . . . excuse, I will try to speak the common language. My Political Adviser is Nicolle Santos. I did not bring another.”

“Very good. The Prime Minister of United Africa, Alexander Grund.”

“My Agricultural Adviser here is Mister Okoro, and my Energy Resource Adviser is Miss Ngouabi.”

“Let the record show that Mr. Kieran Hawthorne, the Prime Minister of Australia, Oceania, and Antarctica is absent.”

Minister Marentette could not contain his disdain for the unrepresented region and its minister. “Who cares! It’s all unimpressive, worthless real estate anyway. Why do we even bother with them?” His outburst attracted disapproving looks from the rest of the ministers and staff which he waved off dismissively.

“They do have a fair amount of coal. Most of the reserves in the northern hemisphere are exhausted. My energy adviser, Miss Ngouabi, informs me that our continent is depleted nearly as much as yours. We may need the reserves in Australia soon.” The African Minister Grund advised.

“The real issue is the development of a new energy source we have been hearing about. The problem is, *we* are not developing it.” Marentette banged his fist on the table. “Some *citizen* is. If this new invention gets out we will lose control of the energy supply. I do not need to remind you of the consequences of that! We have successfully put a stop to development of oil and nuclear energy. Those are large, expensive, operations and we can control that, but these small independents, they are harder to keep track of. We need to . . .”

“Let us have some order here!” Overseer Rachael Smithson broke in trying to get control over Marentette’s outbursts.

“As I was about to say,” Marentette continued in defiance

of Smithson's attempt, "we need to take care for our own best interests!"

"Please Minister Marentette!" Rachael made another attempt to control the outspoken minister. "Do you have a comment Minister Johansson?"

"Yes. Minister Marentette, we are aware that there is one individual who is on the verge of a breakthrough, and we are trying to locate him. We know he is in the northeastern North America."

"Who do we have working on that?" Iha Khosravi asked.

"There are a few, but the most promising leads have come from Martin Grifton," Johansson informed.

"Grifton! That pirate? Can we trust him?" Marentette's plump face was becoming red again.

"Not completely, but he knows that we can ruin him if he gets out of line. We also promised him a large prize if he finds this person for us."

"Prize! His *prize* is that we let him live! Did he not kill that wealthy coalman, Weston, and steal his airship?" Marentette's uncontrollable rage was building.

"Yes, but we gave him proper licensing of the airship for his cooperation in covert operations. No one would suspect him of working with us and, Weston was not really one of us. He was not loyal. Grifton did us a favor," Barbosa added.

Marentette continued, "Well, he should let our Security Forces take over once we find out precisely where this new technology is and who has it. We need that technology for ourselves!"

"I am not sure we have *that* much control over Grifton," Johansson offered.

"Find a way to *get* that much control!"

"We need to be careful. He is also helping with that other problem we have," Barbosa reminded the ministers.

"That!" Marentelle pounded his fist on the table. "That needs to go away! It seems to me that it is a much too sensitive

a problem to put in the hands of Grifton.”

Barbosa tried to clarify the situation. “I would agree, but he stumbled into a connection, so we let him run with it. He doesn't know what we are looking for, just who might have the information we need. He works the area where Robert Reese was from and we expect that we will find what we want there and to put an end to it.”

“I still don't like it, Barbosa, and *you*, Johansson, have other problems. We have been hearing of a lot of unrest in North America.”

“We have it under control. I have appointed new Security Force chiefs in key areas to watch over things and report to me.”

“Ne pas foutre en l'air, Johansson.”

“Can we please have some order here!” Rachael pleaded. Marentette banged his fist on the table again and sat back scowling at the overseer.

As the conference day dragged on the Grifton issue was all but forgotten. Among the ministers there were other concerns, primarily keeping control over the general population. The noted unrest in many areas throughout the world was becoming a major concern for them.

The following abbreviated minutes summary was distributed to the members shortly after the conference:

Minutes of the 2047 spring meeting of the World

Government Ministers.

- Abbreviated summary report -

LIBRARIES

The continued effort to find and dismantle private libraries was discussed. The final closing of public libraries was accomplished in 2045.

Questions:

- Should all books be removed or should they leave

selected fiction and the few approved reference books, like dictionaries? Or, would it be more efficient to just remove everything?

- What might be in the private libraries?
- Can a reward be offered to citizens who expose a private library?

Discussion:

- There might not be many private libraries.
- University libraries may be more of an issue.

Considerations:

- It would take a massive effort to find all libraries.
- More public unrest might be incited.

Action:

- A panel will be convened to consider the problem
- A task force will review university libraries.

EDUCATION

- The monitoring of higher education facilities is continuing.

Questions:

- Is our monitoring program effective?
- Are more agents needed on the field?

Discussion:

- There is evidence that teaching is occurring outside of the prescribed curriculum.
- More field agents may be needed to stop education that is not in line with the interests of the World Government

Action:

- The education review panel will address the situation and report at the next conference

TREE REPLACEMENT PROGRAM

The tree replacement planting and conservation program was opened for review. Private citizens are taking up the challenge to replant trees that had been either burned in great fires or strip cut by the now out of business logging companies.

Questions:

- Is there still a need to put government resources in to this program?

Discussion/vote:

- A unanimous vote ended the funding.

WORLD SECURITY FORCES

The mandatory service in the World Security Force (WSF) was discussed.

Questions:

- Should the mandatory ages of service be changed from age 18 for six years to age 18 for 4 years and whether women should still be included.

Discussion:

- The discussion was tabled for the next quarterly conference.

CLIMATE REPORT

The latest climate conditions report was reviewed. The last of the Antarctic ice seemed to be holding and further melt is not expected.

Questions:

- Has the climate stabilized?
- Will the flooding and fires of the last 50 years subside?

Discussion:

- Further climate change will most likely continue, but at a slower rate.

- The further flooding of coastal cities will be minimal. The new coastlines are not expected to change drastically due to the lack of ice remaining to melt.

- There are fewer forests to burn now. See the Tree Replacement Program discussion above.

- The program to disavow the coal companies of responsibility will continue.

GREENLAND

Greenland is truly green now and poised to become an important agricultural area. There was some discussion of whose control Greenland should be under.

Questions:

- Should be considered a separate continent?

Discussion:

- Minister Johansson argued that it should remain as part of North America. Only Minister Marentette took exception.

Anyone watching the proceedings of the three day conference, if it had been allowed, would have clearly noticed that the ministers greatest concern was keeping their fortunes and power intact. Whether they liked each other or not, they had this one commonality. Among them, Marentette was the richest and most powerful, and least liked and Barbosa the most ruthless.

Unofficial schemes and plans were made outside of the meetings during the conference days. Ministers worked secretly to strengthen their own position or to weaken another's. Distrust and plotting was beginning to destroy the World Government from the inside and none of them realized it except the one Minister who did not attend the conference. Prime Minister Kieran Hawthorne, of the Australian/Oceania continental region, did not trust the other Ministers from the beginning. Too much power coupled with too much greed was a bad combination. Maybe it was the aboriginal blood of his mother's ancestors that made him suspicious of so few trying to control so many. If only he had support from somewhere to make the changes that he knew were so badly needed.

Chapter 1

Eli's Workshop

“Damn it!” Eli Andrews shook his hand and inserted a skinned knuckle into his mouth. The worn wrench kept slipping. *I really need some better tools*, he thought in frustration. Obtaining supplies and tools for his work had become increasingly difficult. Not only were materials scarce, large purchases might call attention to him and that would bring a government investigation into his activities. He had to be careful that his work went unnoticed.

Eli had been working on his new energy generator for years, a reasonably small unit that could power two or three private homes. Scaled up it could power entire communities. Close to completion, but slowed by governmental hindrance and the lack of money and resources, it was frustrating at best. Private investors helped secretly when they could, but his major income came from the old airship he bought after selling some of his inventions. He and his assistant, Ethan Roberts, retrofitted the ship into a fast and efficient craft and used it to start a profitable transport business.

“There's no reason that this should be so difficult and it shouldn't have to be kept secret!” Eli said to his assistant. Ethan had just returned to the warehouse-workshop bringing acetylene and oxygen tanks used for welding. Secrecy was necessary because the coal companies, with assistance from the World Government, desperately wanted to get possession of Eli's invention and make it disappear. If successful, the new power source that Eli worked on would revolutionize the availability of power for the people and remove energy control from the grip of the coal companies.

“Not goin' well?” Ethan knew the look on Eli's face. He was tired, frustrated and angry.

“I am fed up with this damned government making

progress so difficult! I'm almost ready to start a revolution myself!" Eli threw the wrench down with a clang and dropped into a nearby old stuffed chair. "I really hoped that things would improve after the World Government took over. 'Spread the wealth around, help all people, make progress.' It all sounded so good at first. It *was* all good at first. Then those greedy corporate bastards couldn't help themselves. 'All for one and none for all!' That's the way they think. Damn them anyway!"

Ethan knew Eli would regain his usually calm demeanor after he rested awhile. They had been working very long days for weeks now and he was getting more and more furious at the over-controlling government situation as time went on. He was not the only one who felt this way. The increasing taxes and dwindling services were a source of discontent for everyone. Talk of revolution was being heard often now, but fighting such a large government machine was nearly impossible. Still, some of the cooler headed revolutionaries had some promising ideas.

The large iron door at the far end of the warehouse slid open and closed again, grinding on its wheels. Eli and Ethan looked at each other and then toward the door. Fully expecting a government agent, they both tensed. Eli whispered aside to Ethan, "I thought we locked that door."

Out of the dark end of the building they could see a thin figure approaching them. Relieved when they realized who it was, both Eli and Ethan relaxed with a collective sigh and laughed a little at each other.

Eli's airship captain and pilot, Sara Reese, walked up to them with a satisfied grin on her face. She was tall and attractive with long dark hair in a single braid down her back and deep brown eyes. The few loose hair strands gave her a windblown look. Her tight black jeans and tight fitting tank top under her oiled canvas flight jacket showed off her slim figure. The healed boots she wore added to her already unusual

height for a woman. She couldn't be missed when she walked into a place and that's just how she liked it. Those who knew of her had learned to approach her with caution, but now and then some fool would try to hit on her and soon wished he hadn't.

Eli responded to the triumphant grin on her face. "What did you do, put down some unsuspecting fool again?"

"I just love it when they think I'm fair game and don't back off when I warn them." Laughing a little, "Laid him right out in front of his buddies. Didn't know what hit him." Sara knew just enough martial arts to be dangerous and had the advantage of taking bothersome fools by surprise.

"So, I take it you stopped by the Blue Sky Tavern on your way here. You know, one of these days you're going to come up against one that's not so easy to fend off."

Sara dropped into a chair across from Eli. "Yup. Thirsty trip this time." Sara had just returned from a transport run to the blistering tropics. Always a risky trip due to the heat and possibility of fierce weather. Sara, however, was an excellent pilot and fearless. These trips brought in good money since most transporters refused to go there. "And don't worry, I keep *this* just for the tough ones." She slapped the long blade knife she kept strapped to her thigh. "I'll be a lot happier on these trips when you get that invention of yours up and running. The extra heat from the boilers on the ship make tropical trips really, really hot!"

The new power source would run the pumps and propellers on the airship with powerful electric motors rather than steam engines. Less heat would be generated and the weight of the ship would be considerably reduced allowing for more cargo to be transported per trip. The efficiency of the power source would also mean extended range.

Sara focused her gaze on Eli. "You look worn out. How long since you ate or slept?"

"Well...ah...hell, I don't know." Eli ran his hands through

his medium length dark brown hair. His usually close trimmed beard was beginning to get straggly. "It's daylight out isn't it?" The lack of windows in the warehouse made it so that Eli had no sense of time when he was working.

"Nearly noon." Ethan commented. "You've been at it for over 20 hours."

"Augh! I feel like I haven't made even an hour's worth of progress..." Eli slapped his hand on the chair arm sending dust into the air making a small cloud illuminated by the work lamps.

"Well, *boss*," Sara got up and walked to where Eli sat, "you need rest and food. Things will look better then." She offered a hand to help him up.

Eli just stared blankly, not really seeing her. She reached down and grabbed his hand and pulled. Realizing then that he was slipping into a daze, so tired he couldn't think straight, Eli gave in and stood up.

"OK Captain! I'm up!" It never felt right when she called him "boss" even if it was in a mocking way. He felt more like they were partners. Whenever she did that he responded with "Captain" and a salute. It was their little mocking game. He was too tired for the salute.

Her transport work kept him in money enough to survive and work on his inventions. He was also able to pay her well, and she could pick up extra cash with some trading on the side. The transport business was good for both of them and she was quite satisfied with the arrangement. She admired his brilliance and loved that she could be a part of it. They had become good friends.

He couldn't ignore how attractive she was, though, and he struggled at times to keep it just a friendship. He was afraid that if it became anything more it might damage what they had between them now and he liked what they had. It was comfortable and relaxed. He had never noticed any indication that she was attracted to him anyway.

Ethan's voice broke into his wandering thoughts. "I could use a nap myself. Then I'll come back and do some work while you take a break to clear your head."

Eli shook himself out of his daze. "Yes, good. I guess I'm more beat than I thought. Lead on Captain."

Sara gave him a whack on the shoulder and said, "Enough with the Captain crap. Save it for when we're on your ship, *Commander*." Using the title to raise him above her again and poke fun at him for the Captain remark. She pulled him by the arm toward the door she had come in through.

Sliding the iron door open, the bright noonday sun hit Eli in the face and made him wince and his eyes water. "Whoa, crap! I feel like I've been in a cave for days." Eli came to a stop until he could see again. Sara laughed and gave him a tug.

"Where we going, the Blue Sky?"

"Nah. I think I'd better stay out of there for a day or two." Sara quipped.

"So, you did some damage did you?" Eli knew how worked up she could be after a long transport flight. "It put you in a good mood, though, I think."

Sara just smiled and kept walking dragging Eli along. "We'll go over to Molly's Diner and then your place so you can get some rest. Then I have got to get back to the ship to unload some goodies that you'll like."

"Ah! I'm intrigued. If I weren't so tired I'd go help with the ship"

"No you don't! I've got it handled. I'll be back to your place around 8." Sara gave him a tug and picked up the pace.

~

When they entered the diner the smell of fried food made Eli suddenly realize that he was starving. "Oh, man! I could eat a napkin right now."

"Want ketchup wi' dat?" Molly had overheard him and was always ready with a wisecrack. "av a sate an' i'll git somethin' tastier than a napkin for yer." Molly's Irish accent

sounded soothing in some inexplicable way. Her sentences usually ended in an up note typical of the accent.

Sara pushed him into a booth seat. “Thanks, Molly. Probably his usual so he doesn't have to think about it.” Eli often ordered Molly's chili served with hot cornbread and it became “his usual”. “And, I'll have one of those nearly eatable burgers you make.” Molly knew she was joking about the “nearly eatable” part. Sara always ordered it with a big pile of fries. Her burger concoctions were not that bad considering that real meat was very expensive and hard to come by these days. “Oi swear lassy, oi don't nu 'oy yer keep so trim eatin' loike dat”

“I hardly eat at all when I'm out on transports. This makes up for it.”

Molly took their order and turned back to the kitchen. Molly MacGowen came to Barrie from Ireland when the government forces seized her home after her husband was accused of harboring government resistance fugitives. She changed her name and slipped out of the country to Canada. There was more to Molly than either of them, or nearly anyone else, knew.

After they ate, fatigue seized Eli and he felt that he could easily drift off to sleep right there. Sara paid the bill and dragged him out before he slipped down onto the booth bench. Her place was closer, so she decided to take him there where he could sleep while she went back to the ship. Her apartment was small, nothing like Eli's house, but it was comfortable enough and he could rest there undisturbed.

Once in the apartment he flopped on her bed and was out in seconds. Sara removed his boots and covered him with a light blanket before heading out to the mooring tower where the ship was docked.

Chapter 2

Ethan and Jill

With Eli and Sara having just left the warehouse, Ethan secured the oxygen and acetylene tanks for the welder against the wall and walked over to the new project that Eli had been working on. He stared at it for a minute wondering what he could do that would help move things along. *Replacing the worn tools would certainly help*, he thought, picking up the wrench that Eli had thrown down. It was not uncommon for Ethan to know what was needed without being told and Eli knew that this trait made him invaluable as an assistant along with his fabrication and electronics skills. Sometimes they worked together like one mind.

He turned and walked out the east door, at the opposite end of the building from where Eli and Sara had left, locked it, and headed for his apartment. He had been up and working nearly as long as Eli and was beginning to feel the draining effects of the long hours. A short nap and something to eat would help him to think clearer. Then he could go and try to bargain for some better tools.

The mid-spring day was comfortably warm and the sun was bright despite the always present haze of a polluted sky. He enjoyed the 10 minute walk to his apartment on days like this, but it was brutal in the winter. Someday, he hoped, he would be able to afford a steam car . . . or something better, and move farther out of town.

His apartment was in an old school building at the edge of town. The warehouse was just over a kilometer farther out. The classrooms of the former school building were reconfigured into multi-room apartments with up to 3 bedrooms. Ethan had rented a 2 bedroom so that he would have an extra room for a library and a place to store things he

collected. He was always picking up odd things to study or junked electronics to salvage for parts. The extra room was becoming quite full.

He approached the building, went in through the main doors, and up the stairs to his apartment on the second floor. Inserting his key in the lock, and discovering that it wasn't locked, he hesitated before opening the door. He was sure he had locked it, but he was in a hurry when he left last night. *Maybe . . .* The door flung open making him jump back. "Geez! What the hell!?" Sara's sister Jill had pulled the door open. "How . . . what . . . how did you get in here?"

Jill was laughing at the expression on his face. "You left the door unlocked. So, I thought I'd come in and straighten the place up a little for you. It's not like I've never been here before. But, don't think I'm going to come over and clean up for you all the time."

Jill liked Ethan and she really would come over and clean up for him all the time, well maybe some of the time, but she was not about to let him know that. Not being too sure if they were just friends, or something more, she didn't want to scare him off. He would occasionally invite her over for movie night since they both liked the same kinds of movies and Ethan enjoyed them more when watching with someone else. Ethan worked a lot and didn't have many friends having moved to Barrie from a small town in Maine only a few years ago. He had met Jill when she came to the warehouse with her sister one time and they immediately hit it off. Jill, however, quickly decided that she didn't like Eli. He had been working a long hard day and wasn't especially pleasant toward her and her sister. Sara understood, but Jill took offense.

"I thought you would be home later than this and it would be a surprise," Jill explained.

"Oh, it was a surprise alright!" Ethan's statement got Jill laughing all over again.

"Well do come in. It *is* your place. Hungry?" Jill was an

exceptional cook and Ethan would be glad not to have to fix something for himself.

“Yes. Very. I came home to eat a little and get a nap before going back over to the workshop,” Ethan explained.

“He works you too hard.”

“Not at all. I like what I do and Eli's a good guy. You need to give him another chance.”

“Yeah, maybe. Have a seat. I'm sure I can come up with something to feed you.” Jill began rummaging through the refrigerator and cupboards. “You do have *real* food in this place, don't you?” Most of what she found would be considered junk food to her. Ethan didn't answer. He was already dozing off in a comfortable chair.

Jill decided to just make him a sandwich and leave it on the table for him. Then she would head out to enjoy the day for awhile before having to go to work serving at the Blue Sky around 5 o'clock. It wasn't a great job, but with her good looks she was always going home with a lot of tip money. She had her sister's dark hair and her own steel blue eyes that could stare right through you. She used it all to her advantage. She could charm men and women alike.

Chapter 3

The Watch

After she supervised the unloading of the airship and having the crates containing the surprise for Eli delivered to the warehouse, Sara started back to her place where she had left Eli sleeping. The spring breeze felt good and, being the end of day at the end of a work week, many people were on the streets heading home or to a tavern.

When Sara entered her apartment she found Eli still deeply asleep, so she was careful to move about quietly. Within a few minutes, though, Eli woke up. “Oh, hi,” Eli groggily propped himself up on one elbow on Sara's bed. “Wait. This is your place. What am I doing . . . ?”

Sara interrupted, amused at his confusion, “You were more out of it than I thought. I knew you were really tired, so, I brought you here rather than have to drag you all the way back to your place. You've been out for about 5 hours.”

“Really? Must be the long hours and the stress have taken a toll on me.”

“Let me get you some coffee.” Sara headed to her small kitchen space to make coffee. Her apartment consisted of only two rooms; the bathroom and the room that served as kitchen, living room, and bedrooms for her and her sister. It was a large space with the areas divided only by placement of the furniture. The late afternoon sun provided a warm glow shining through the large west windows.

“You don't plan to go back to the workshop tonight do you? You will think better if you take a break and relax until morning.” Sara was in the mood to just hang out and talk with Eli for a while and hoped he would stay around. They hadn't done that in months and she was feeling like they were becoming disconnected.

“You're probably right. A little recharge would help, I

guess.” The fatigue from working 18 hour days for what must have been weeks, was beginning to catch up to him. A little time with Sara would be a nice break.

“What is it, about 7 o'clock?” Eli looked around in vain for a clock.

Sara glanced over at the sundial she had sitting on the window sill, “Yes, about seven.”

Noticing where Sara looked, Eli was amused. “Wow, how low tech can you get!?! You do realize that thing is rarely the same as civil time.”

“Well, mister engineer, I don't have to wind it and never have to replace the battery. And, if it's cloudy I just don't care.”

“I'll keep that in mind when I have to make up the schedule for your trips!” Eli replied with a smirk.

“Not to worry. I have this old pocket watch that my dad gave me.” Sara pulled the gold chain that ran from a clip on the waistband of her jeans to the pocket and revealed a gold pocket watch.

Eli got up and walked over to Sara to inspect the watch. It felt heavy in his hand, solid. The detail of the raised design on the back could be clearly felt, as if it had little wear. Sara obviously took good care of it. “This is very nice. Your father gave it to you? You have never said much about your father.”

Sara's expression went visibly sad. “I know. I try not to dwell on it much. He disappeared shortly after he gave me this.”

“Disappeared? How?”

Sara hesitated and leaned back on the counter staring at the floor, thoughts and feelings surfacing from that time. “I was 15. We were living in Toronto where he taught and did research at the university. He said that he was going on an exploratory mission for the university. At least that was what he told me. I think my mother suspected otherwise, but never said. He gave me the watch and said to keep it for him until he got back. It felt to me like he was not coming back. And, he

never did.”

---End of preview---

Thank you for reading this preview of
The Raven Squad.

The adventure and mystery begins with Chapter 3
entitled *The Watch*, which is incomplete in this preview.

To order the print book or ebook, please visit
<http://RisingRiver.scimuze.com> or find on Amazon,
Barnes and Noble, Ingram as well as others.

- JOR