

Brother Jomar



Brother Jomar peered over the side of the barge. He had rather hoped to travel on the monorail, but apparently the timeliness of his arrival in the city of Liberty was not a matter of particular importance. The Order of Malthus in His Aspect as the Personification of Self-Restraint wanted him in the city, but not at the expense of a monorail ticket. So the deck of an open barge it was.

He was self-aware enough to realise that he wasn't held in high regard by the Order. At the age of sixteen, his parents, serfs working on one of the large grain estates, offered him to the management. It was traditional, all children would be offered. Those accepted (the vast majority) would be granted a plot of land to farm on their own behalf, whilst working three days out of every five for the plantation. The overseer, who had watched Jomar grow up, had declined the offer (unusual in itself) but had suggested that Jomar might be more suited for the religious life.

It has to be admitted that the Order greeted his arrival with a disappointing lack of enthusiasm. Still over the following years they had given him a fair trial. He had spent a month shadowing one of the preachers, but it was obvious that Jomar had no aptitude for that life.

It was then assumed that he might make good as a lay brother of the order. The offspring of serfs being assumed to have a good grounding in the rudiments of agriculture. It took six months for the master of lay brothers to come to the same conclusion as the plantation overseer and he passed Jomar back to the Hierophant in charge of the grange.

The Hierophant then placed Jomar under one of the lesser spiritual directors. This was not so much because he wondered whether Jomar had a calling in that area, but that that particular spiritual director had irritated him some months previously and the Hierophant had been looking for a suitable vengeance.

For six glorious months, Jomar was taught the arts of meditation. Indeed he rapidly achieved mastery. Few could empty their mind as quickly as Jomar, but there again, the unkind suggested that few had as little to empty out. Still, Jomar could rapidly sink into meditation and his spiritual director soon realised he could ask Jomar to meditate and he would be rid of him for the full day. Apparently some more spiritual individuals asked what would happen if, through his meditations, Jomar did manage to achieve communion with the Supreme Being. His retort, "That is the Supreme Being's problem, not mine," is theologically questionable but anybody who knew Jomar would understand where the spiritual director was coming from.

It was then that somebody had the idea of enrolling Jomar in the Brothers Militant. Whilst he wasn't an obvious candidate, it was discovered that he had hidden talents. These martial brethren were issued with the Goppo-Spebock energy carbine. It is a somewhat eccentrically designed weapon, the power cell looks for all the world like a magazine, and when the cell is empty, one ejects it just as one would eject an empty magazine. Another eccentricity is the hardwiring system which allows the weapon to interface to the firer. A remarkably heavy cable clips to a pack normally worn at the back on a belt. It is the belt pack which interfaces with the wearer's central nervous system, but not by a jack which connected directly into the spine. Instead the Coppo-Spebock uses a delicate induction system, where the scanner build into the belt pack would read the impulses of the wearer, but from a slight distance. Professionals argue about the merits of this system, but whilst it is less sensitive, it is normally sensitive 'enough', and has the advantage that the wearer does not need surgery and can put down his carbine without having to unplug it from himself. (In layman's terms it's cheaper and more flexible, but perhaps not as 'good'.)

Yet Jomar seemed to have an affinity with the Coppo-Spebock. Certainly he seemed to communicate with it better than he communicated with his superiors, and his weapon was always in pristine condition. He was even a competent marksman. At last he seemed to have found a place in the Order.

One piece of equipment Jomar was not allowed was the ceremonial rebreather. Whilst it can be used by brothers advancing through deep water (with care, the carbine isn't really supposed to be used in those conditions) it is also good for those atmospheres where there is inadequate oxygen. More importantly it allowed the wearer to inhale a selection of stimulants or narcotic pain relief compounds depending on need. After one sad experience where Jomar managed to suffer simultaneously from oxygen narcosis, chemical over-stimulation and narcotic sedation, it was realised he was probably better off without it. When he was tasked to wear one, the tanks were drained and he was instructed to stay dry.

Still, he was not without his advantages, his ability to meditate meant that he could stand, absolutely stationary, on guard duty. He would happily volunteer for the most tedious sentry positions. It was this that led to him ending up on the barge. It was Brother Almoner who had assumed he was asleep and had crept up on him. But Jomar, although deep in meditation, was mentally running through the training kata as a way of providing his meditation focus. Whilst he didn't perform the movements, he tried to time the kata so its big finish coincided with him having to start the next patrol.

Thus at an entirely inappropriate moment he performed a sharp turn, smashing an imaginary antagonist with his carbine, and shouted 'Hai' into the face of a reeling Brother Almoner.

Next day he was summoned to the office of the Hierophant. There Jomar was informed that he had the qualities that would be needed in the new shrine being erected in Liberty. He was escorted down to the river and was seen on board a barge. He was informed that it might take two or three days to get to Liberty. Jomar settled down to enjoy the scenery and to meditate. Soon his gentle snores could be heard by the steersman.