

CORR SYL



THE TERRIBLE

Excerpt

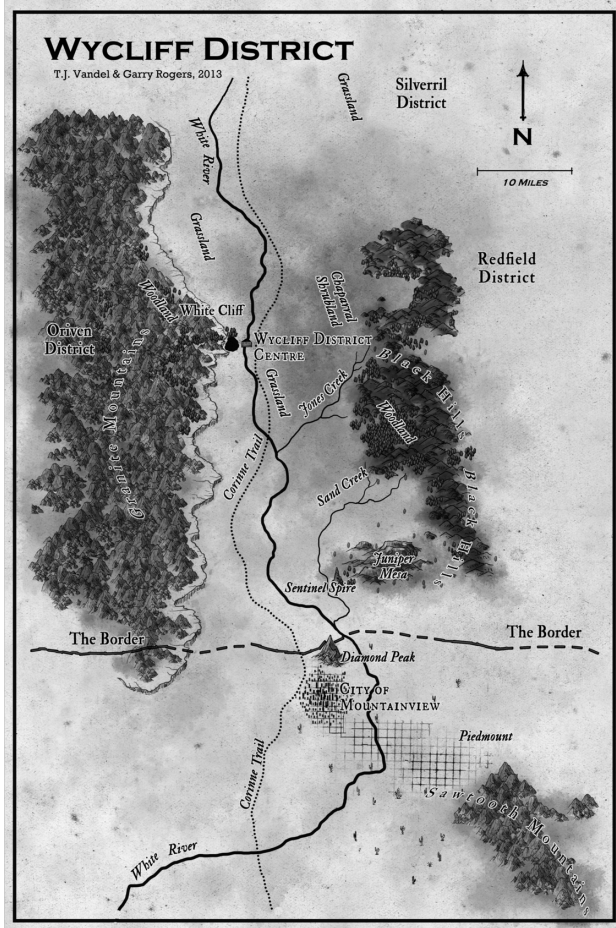
GARRY ROGERS

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The characters in this book aren't real. They live only in our thoughts. [There is a complete list of characters and places in the appendix.]

10 Corr Syl the Terrible



What Came Before

This story begins where the novel *Corr Syl the Warrior* ends. After the war with the great armies of Aaron Li, Corr and Rhya separate. Corr returns to Wycliff District to find and execute Allon Trofeld, and Rhya leaves for the Continental Center to help correct a Human defect that limits intelligence. She travels with Abel Remington.

If You Haven't Read *Warrior*

Corr Syl and Rhya Bright are young warriors who are descended from rabbits. Their story takes place on an Earth like ours, except that animals bigger than bugs are intelligent (some bugs are also intelligent).

Soon after Corr Syl completed his combat training, and before he had a chance for a vacation, he became involved in a conflict between Humans and Earth's many other intelligent animal species, collectively known as the Tsaeb (silent *T*, long *A*, silent *E*—*sāb*). Rhya Bright helped Corr end the conflict.

Corr and Rhya look like Humans with gray fur, auburn eyes, and long whiskers. Other terrestrial animals also have Human shapes. Like Corr and Rhya, however, they have their species' original skin covering and color. Birds and fish, though intelligent, still have the forms, feathers, and fins that let them fly and swim.

The Tsaeb civilization developed millions of years before Humans came down from the trees. Because of their great time advantage, Tsaeb knowledge of themselves and the natural world is far more advanced than Human knowledge.

Part I: Betrayal and Pursuit



The Search for Rhya

Corr was at his family home in the plains north of Wycliff District Center. The Continental Council had asked him to come with Rhya, but he had first completed a mission and had gone home for a visit. In the familiar rounded rooms carved in stone and floored with the soft rugs his mother wove, Corr lost interest in saving the world. Had it not been for Rhya, he would have refused the Continental Council's invitation.

After dinner, stories, and laughter over the Syl family history, Corr went out to look at the moonlit landscape.

He leapt up and knelt on the rough surface of the miniature mesa that capped the Syl home. Its top etched round by rain and its base eroded by blowing sand, the mesa resembled a gritty mushroom. West of Corr, the high Granite Mountains made a hazy wall stretching away to the south. Northeast, an ancient seabed shimmered in the

moonlight. Corr didn't look east toward the Black Hills that made the eastern border of Wycliff District and reached toward the faint glow of the Human city of Mountainview sixty miles south. In those hills, he had killed a friend.

Should he go to the Continental Center? The need pulled at him, but he couldn't decide. He'd been home for a week, and his parents' care was turning into concern. A breeze arrived, stirred by the dry air's shrinking contact with cooling stone. Should he make his long-planned exploration of the world? Wouldn't he be a better warrior and be better fit to serve after he had seen other places? Must he be a warrior? The breeze died. In the cool still air, a cricket sang, and a pygmy owl called. He wondered if Rhya's work at the Continental Center would give her enough status to feel equal and return his feelings.

Corr made a slow turn to face the Black Hills. He was trained to kill. He had memorized the anatomy of hundreds of species, and he had practiced the precise strikes needed to kill each one.

Corr understood his problem: Tsaeb are born with the instinctive tendency to protect life. Warriors learn to let conscious decisions overcome the instinct. *I have tried, but either my instinct is more powerful than average, or I haven't trained properly*, Corr mused. Should he return his swords to his teacher and seek another profession? Would Rhya care if he were a librarian or a gleaner caring for the land? Shoulders slumped, head down, the young warrior cast an unhappy shadow.

Whistol Farr, the Chairman of the Continental Council, broke into Corr's reverie. "Corr, I've just learned that someone has taken Rhya. It happened

seventy-five miles west of Brushy Mountain. Right now that's all we know."

Time froze for an instant, then roared away. Corr's thoughtstreams thrashed, then crashed together and fused. Taken? What did that mean? Corr searched his memory and discovered no recent examples, but he found definitions and advice. Rhya's abductors wanted something from her or from those who cared for her.

What was he doing here? He should have warned her; he should have gone with her. He needed to find her. Now.

Corr called Rhya. No answer. He called Able Remington and asked for details.

"We had stopped to camp when a group of Tsaeb ran up and covered us with nets. We were two days from the Center," Remington said.

That was one-thousand miles east of Corr. At his best speed, it would take five days to get there on foot. He had to go south to Mountainview and try to borrow a plane . . . ah, there was an old Tsaeb plane in the Continental Museum. Maybe he could use that.

During the ten-million years of war following the dinosaur extinction, Tsaeb warriors had built flying warcraft. One of them sat in the catacombs beneath the Continental Center Museum. Corr's teacher, Halbert Sims, assumed the plane used antimatter power. Antimatter engines exhausted super-hot air that would add a problem to the complex concerns of the Tsaeb gleaners who cared for the land. No Tsaeb wanted that.

However, Rhya was an important person. Her need justified the plane's use—if it still worked. Corr called the museum, introduced himself to the curator, and asked if he could use the old aircraft.

“Of course you can use the craft. Anyone can, but you are the first to ask while I have been here. I remember seeing a warrior symbol on the side, so I guess it belonged to the warrior guild. Let me look it up.”

While he searched for the craft’s records, the curator said, “Corr, the old warcraft is mysterious. Warriors must have built it near the end of the Age of War. It’s the oldest relic in the museum. I saw it when I started working here—it looked shiny and new. Ah, here’s the access number. I have to go to the vault.”

A few minutes later, the curator said, “I found a folder, but there’s nothing in it except a sheet of blue material inscribed with two lines. The first line says ‘Key’ followed by a series of letters and numbers. The second line says ‘Designation: IOZ-1899.’

“I’m not sure how to activate the craft, and I don’t know if it still works. This is the key.” The curator read a string of forty-five characters. “Try projecting the designation and key in your thoughts along with your location, and I’ll tell you if the ship responds.”

As this conversation was going on, Corr was speculating that the Tsaeb ship was too old to fly. He used another thoughtstream to call the Mountainview Embassy security office about chartering an airplane. Then he repeated the key and the longitude and latitude coordinates for the Embassy. He could be there by morning. If the ship arrived, fine, but if it didn’t, he would borrow an airplane.

The museum curator said, “Corr, I guess that worked, the ship disappeared.”

The acting director of the Mountainview Embassy returned Corr’s call and asked for details. “What size plane and how long do you need it?”

“It only has to carry me, but I need it to have good range and speed. A week will do. Can you arrange something by morning?”

“By mid-morning,” the director said.

“Good, I’ll be there.”

Corr went in to get his gear. He explained to his mother and father that Rhya was in trouble and that he was going to help her. His father nodded, and his mother gave him a hug. “Corr, just a moment,” she said. She went into her workroom and returned with a small folded bundle.

“Tuck this in your pack. It will keep you warm and dry.”

Outside, Corr headed for the Corinne Trail, the ancient north-south route that led down White River Valley to Mountainview. He set a pace that would take him to the Embassy by morning.

* * *

The sun was up when Corr reached Mountainview. He followed the street he and Rhya had used when they came to investigate the Human border crossings last spring. As he ran along stepping stones that had replaced the sidewalk, he was pleased to see that most of the street’s pavement was gone and the soil had been tilled. He passed the home of his friends, the Thomases, and caught familiar thoughts, but had no time to stop. Three blocks later, he turned and saw the huge natural rock dome looming above everything nearby. As he neared, he saw a blue object inside the front gate. Paintings and sculpture filled the walls and floor of the Embassy. The blue thing must be a new outdoor sculpture.

The Embassy director called, "Corr, how long until you get here?"

"I'm approaching now."

"Do you see the big blue egg?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's yours."

"Mine?"

"Yes. It appeared sometime last night. Our security chief traced the designation on its side to the Continental Center Museum. The curator said it was an old warrior craft on loan to you. I need you to move it. It's so near the Embassy entrance that people can't enter."

Thirty feet long and twenty feet high, the cobalt blue craft sat on the gravel path to the Embassy entrance like a smug egg. *Smug? Smugness?* Corr began running a perception check. The feeling was coming from the craft. *Peculiar.* Gleaming smooth without wings, doors, or windows, the ship's only feature was a warrior insignia and the characters IOZ-1899.



IOZ-1899

Corr said, "Okay, I'll move it. Uh, I might not need a plane now."

As a growing group of Embassy visitors and staff watched, Corr walked around the craft looking for an entrance. Nothing broke the smooth, gleaming surface. He stepped back on the side with the insignia and said, "Open the door," to no result, and then, "Open the door please." Still nothing. Finally, he tried reciting the key and thinking, *OPEN THE DOOR.*

An opening appeared at ground level in front of him. Scattered cheers came from the visitors. Corr wiggled the fur on his orbital ridges at them and stepped through the opening into a dim space.

As he entered, he tingled, and his tactical senses buzzed. A precise thought appeared without the fuzzy blur of most thoughts: “Corr Syl, welcome to Mobile Warrior Command Base IOZ-1899.”

Huh. There weren’t any controls or portholes. Unsure of what to do, Corr said, “Can you open ports?”

“Yes, but view screens show more.”

“Okay.”

Corr was standing a few yards from the Embassy entrance. The crowd of spectators were looking in his general direction. In front of him, a hazy blue prolate spheroid enclosed a semi-transparent ball of light surrounding a miniature person. The person was Corr. *Wow*. Corr reached out and felt something like dense air against his fingertips as he touched the spheroid. He pushed through and felt similar resistance. “IOZ-1899, what is this?”

“Your hand is in the control. You can achieve motion by pretending that I’m a hand puppet, but using thoughts will be more efficient. You are registered and no longer need to preface orders with my designation. You can use Z99 if you wish.”

“Okay, Z99, how do I work the control?”

“Picture the spheroid moving, and the ship moves; move the inner simulation, and the view changes.”

Corr called Whistol Farr at the Continental Center and, for the first time in his life, got no response—no message, no way to leave a message, just silence. *The ship?*

“Z99, let me make a call.” This time Farr answered. Corr got coordinates for Rhya’s abduction and gave them to Z99.

“Shall I activate security?” Z99 asked.

“Sure.”

“What level?”

“What levels are there?”

“Least, full, and anything in between that you wish.”

“What’s the difference?”

“For general ship control, least allows control by anyone with the key. Full limits control to the last individual that used the key and entered. You may also choose least or full for my systems. The systems are life support, defense, pilot, and power. Each—”

“Use full for all,” Corr said. He’d study the options after he found Rhya.

Corr needed sleep. He decided that he could watch the landscape flow by another time. He curled up on the floor and closed his thoughtstreams, leaving only his tactical senses alert.

Two hours later, he awoke. He felt stiff, but not as much as he had expected after a sixty-mile run and a nap on a steel floor. Soft. The floor was soft. He rolled onto his back. The floor hardened, but in seconds, it began softening. Nice.

He stood and looked down through the floor view screen. Nothing was flowing beneath the ship. Instead, he saw brown leaves scattered across dry grass. There was a willow thicket ahead, and a tall white sycamore across a small stream. While he had slept, they had traveled a thousand miles. *That was fast.*

“Z99, open the door.”

As he left the ship, Corr sensed someone watching. The observer was making a call using a mobile phone. While listening in on the call, Corr studied tracks. When he heard a helicopter and sensed a group of Tsaeb approaching on foot, he yanked out his new blanket and spread it over a patch of tall grass. Then he crossed the stream, stood in front of the sycamore, and shifted his fur to match the white and gray mottled bark.

Corr glanced at the ship. “Z99, are you safe from Human weapons?”

“Yes.”

Corr’s auburn eyes followed two black para-sails floating toward his blanket decoy. He squinted as rivers of plasma as blinding as lightning blasted the decoy. They had Tsaeb warrior hand weapons! He should have moved the ship. Four more attackers came running and swept long, shining blades through the smoldering ash that had been his blanket.

Corr’s jaw tightened, his eyes narrowed, and he grabbed his own plasma weapon. He aimed and then paused. Who had sent these Tsaeb, and where was Rhya? Corr replaced the blaster and removed two rubber bulbs from a pouch on his harness. He sped up his movements and crossed the wash.

Flashing among the attackers, he dropped them with a puff from the rubber bulbs. Dreading what he would see, he walked through the dust and smoke to see if the Z99 had survived. And there it was, just as he had left it. Nothing could resist plasma blasts from Tsaeb weapons, but Z99 could. The insignia wasn’t even tarnished.

The attackers’ eyes held fear, but mental shields of thatched static hid their thoughts. The

strength of the shields surprised Corr. He picked at one, but decided it would take hours to penetrate—hours Rhya might not have. He called the Continental Center security staff and explained what he needed.

Corr searched pouches and packs. The assassins' long, heavy swords and their steel and leather armor were familiar—*Asian*, he thought—but they carried nothing that showed their exact origin. Their gear reminded him of the Wolverine assassin Barth Noland. He called the Mountainview Embassy and learned that Norland had escaped during the war. All of the assassins had a patch on their weapons harness with the letters *OFTA*. Corr ripped one off and dropped it in a pouch.

With a glance at the blackened trees and burnt remnants of the blanket, Corr left the dust and odor of the scene for the cleaner air across the wash. He launched thoughtstreams to review chronology, analyze the information he had, and form a plan of action.

Had Rhya's kidnapper known Corr would come? Two blasting para-sailors and four ground troops would have killed an ordinary Tsaeb, but they had no chance against a Tsaeb warrior. Whoever planned the attack was unaware of Tsaeb warrior abilities.

Corr remembered the two Wolverine who had come after him before the war had worn the *OFTA* insignia. Somewhere a powerful enemy had survived the war and was using Rhya as bait.

Was that all? Had they taken Rhya just to lure Corr? Rhya could be dead, but Corr didn't think so. Would Rhya's captors keep her alive now that he had survived this attack? Corr forced himself to relax.

22 Corr Syl the Terrible

Seconds later, Corr heard the helicopter returning. *Good.* As it landed, he jerked the door open, leapt onto the pilot, pinned the man's arms with his knees, and began studying the man's thoughts.

A charter-flight dispatcher had hired the pilot to pick up Corr's attackers, and return to its base in a nearby Human city. The group would board a plane, but the pilot didn't know the plane's destination.

Corr jumped out and ran for the ship. There were two options: He could go to the helicopter's base and try to learn Rhya's destination, or he could interview Remington. Though Able Remington held the trust of many, Corr had known from their first meeting that the lynx was hiding something. Interviewing Remington at the Continental Center was the next step.

Appendix. People and Places

People

Mandarin Chinese pronunciation: *X* is pronounced *sh*. *Zh* is pronounced as the middle phoneme in *measure*. *C* is pronounced as *ts* in *bits*.

Allysen Olykden: Antelope descendent warrior in Corr Syl's former battle group. Known ability to analyze complex situations and produce effective combat strategy. Corr Syl's best friend.

Bataar: Moose descendent Corr met in the waiting area of Ya Zhōu's headquarters.

Bataar (William) Lee (Wilder): Collard lizard descendent warrior in Corr Syl's former battle group. Known for powerful telepathic sense and caustic nature.

Lactella: Black widow spider that took control of Ivanstor Johns after her first Human host, the little girl Susan, became ill.

Ivanstor Johns: Former Manager of the City of Mountainview.

Ming Cai: Wife of Wen. Corr met the Cai family in Shulindao Park.

Ralph Mäkinen: Wolf descendent warrior in Corr Syl's former battle group. Known for berserk combat tactics and protective nature.

Nie Zheng: One of Corr Syl's pseudonyms.

24 Corr Syl the Terrible

Zuberi Taxus: Badger descendent warrior in Corr Syl's former battle group. Known ability to anticipate events.

Wen Cai: Husband of Ming. Corr met the Cai family in Shulindao Park.

Places

Mandarin Chinese pronunciation: *X* is pronounced *sh*. *Zh* is pronounced as the middle phoneme in *measure*. *C* is pronounced as *ts* in *bits*.

Andao: The urban district home of Zhōu's assassins.

Badain Jaran: Desert in northern Taoso. Bataar's home region.

Kara Sea: Northern boundary of Taoso.

Mountainview: Human city origin of Ivanstor Johns whose actions led Aaron Li to launch the great world war.

Shǎnzo: Ya Zhōu's home province.

Shulindao: Public park Corr entered.

Taoso: Ya Zhōu's home country.

Tübō: Nie Zheng's home territory.

Wycliff District: Home of Corr Syl and Rhya Bright.

Xinzun: Nie Zheng's home.

Xijiang: Nie Zheng's home province.

Xi'ou: Capital of Taoso's Shǎnzo province. Ya Zhōu's headquarters city.

Yunshan Sheng: Bataar's home province.

Acknowledgements

My mother read to me and gave me books to read. The first novel she gave me was Edgar Rice Burrows' *Tarzan the Terrible*, and I still have it.

Science fiction readers will recognize the Z99. It is like David Grinnell's fabulous ship in *Across Time: Quest in the Year One Million*:

"This is the right ship, Commander," said a soft voice near him. And as he turned, the voice continued, "This is the Master Cruiser 12-12-12, power rating One, in the service of System Tyrr, of the Fifth Galactic Federation" (David Grinnell. 1957. *Across Time: Quest in the Year One Million*. Ace Books, New York. 150p, 79).

Thanks again to Professor Rubi for his tireless urging to tell my story, not write it. I try to improve, Joe. Thanks to Denise for reading and commenting on an early draft.

Afterword

The Tsaeb warriors appeared at a time when Earth's intelligent creatures were endangering their own existence. War and environmental pollution were destroying the planet. They were also sorting out Earth's intelligent species. Evolutionary trial and error began eliminating the worst actors and favoring the species with an instinct for preservation that went beyond immediate fear, appetite, and self-defense to include concern for the future consequences of their actions. The rabbits were the first of these survivors. They formed the warrior guild and began helping evolution cut dangerous species.

As the Earth you and I inhabit endures a period of mass extinctions of plants and animals, it's clear that humans don't have the wisdom needed to protect the planet. Out of ignorance, we're causing a disaster that will change Earth for millions of years, if not forever. The changes will bring hardship and death to most creatures, humans included.

Here's what's happening. The gasses produced by our industries, automobiles, and fires are trapping heat from the sun. Our atmosphere and oceans are warming. As they warm—and it takes only a few degrees—the great polar ice sheets begin to melt, and evaporation from ocean surfaces increases. Planetary atmospheric and oceanic circulation changes. Rainfall increases in some places and decreases in others. Storms become stronger—and stronger.

You can get a general picture of what's happening with a few minutes of reading. The best sources

Corr Syl the Terrible 27

are included in the Rebel Mouse newsletter on my website. Go to <http://garryrogers.com/climate-news>.

About the Author



Garry Rogers is an independent author and advocate for wildlife and nature conservation. He served as a professor of physical geography at Columbia University in New York City, and as CEO of the international computer-products distributor, Academic Distributing, Inc. His work to preserve nature is chronicled on his website: <http://garryrogers.com>.