

BOOK TWO

THE QUEST FOR TRUTH

BROCK EASTMAN

KEYSTONE



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ON THE FAMILY

Praise for *Risk*

Brock Eastman is a writer with a passion that ignites his pen and drives the reader to burn through each page. These action-packed books will keep you desiring more of the adventure as you untangle the mysteries within and become friends with the characters.

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The journey you are about to go on is filled with detail, wonder, and surprise. After reading this book, you will only wish you could go to the jungle-filled basin of Ero Doeht. Enjoy the ride, and good luck trying to put this book down.

—**Brian Stewart**, father of two, Colorado

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—**Mark Redekop**, the *Adventures in Odyssey Wiki*

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Praise for The Quest for Truth series

I'm constantly on the lookout for books that are exciting, but not too scary for my school-aged children. Eastman consistently delivers action-packed page-turners that are not only a joy for the whole family to read, but also strengthen our spiritual walks.

—**Elissa Peterson**, mother of four, creator of
Don't Let Life Pass You By blog

I cannot wait for *Risk* to come out. I loved *Taken*. I read it over and over again when I can.

—**Caleb Frey**, age 11

RISK

THE QUEST FOR TRUTH

TAKEN

RISK

UNLEASH

TANGLE

HOPE

RISK

THE SECOND ADVENTURE IN
THE QUEST FOR TRUTH

BROCK EASTMAN



P U B L I S H I N G

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To my mom:

You let me dream big,
and you selflessly helped me along the way to those dreams.
Thank you for helping me to get where I am.

P.S. Thanks for always making me Russian Tea.

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Prologue

Nine Years Ago

The man wore a grey suit and a black tie with a skull-shaped pin holding it in place. His coal-black hair belied his true age. However, his cold blue eyes revealed his power and focus.

He looked out on the new cadets from behind the darkly tinted windows of the tower. There were nearly a hundred fresh recruits, most of them older than he'd liked, but they would have to do. Their age made it more difficult to conduct the sort of intense reeducation necessary. But again, he had to work with the hand he'd been dealt.

The cold, wintery weather of the planet made the training intense but further served to separate the weak from the strong. For too long they had been letting their standards slip, and their observer was determined to change that.

"Sir, your son is third from the left in the front row," a soldier in a black trench coat pointed out.

"Silence!" the older man hissed, his blue eyes narrowing. "Do not mention my son. No one is to know." The man's chin rose, and he glared at the soldier. "Speak of it again and you'll never speak thereafter."

The soldier nervously swallowed the lump in his throat. "Yes, sir."

“I’ve seen enough. See to it that his training”—he pointed a gloved hand at the cadet identified to be his son—“is extra hard, and be sure that he does not suspect anything.”

“Yes, sir.” The soldier saluted.

“Have my ship prepared. I’m leaving,” the suited man said harshly.

“Yes, sir,” the soldier repeated and opened the door for his commander to exit. “When shall we expect you back?”

“You shan’t,” the man said without a second look back, the soles of his shiny black shoes clanking with every step down.

As he reached the bottom of the stairs, he fingered something in his pocket. The information on the paper in his hand wasn’t exactly useful, but it did bring confirmation of what he’d always believed to be true. Finally, after years of hard work, it was within reach. Now he just had to be patient and put things into motion. It might take years yet, but he would be the one to find it. He would finally have the power to control his own fate. And, if he chose, control the fates of others.

Turning the handle to the exit, he stepped out onto a landing pad and surveyed his prized black ship, the *Raven*. It would take him on the final leg of this journey, possibly his longest assignment yet. He straightened his suit with a shift of his shoulders, then started toward the transport.

A narrow side hatch slid open, and a soldier greeted him with a salute. “Sir!”

The man in the suit shook his head and grumbled. “Tone it down.”

“Yes, sir,” the soldier responded.

He liked regimented order, but he would not miss the constant “yes, sirs” that accompanied his rank. No, the next few years would be quite a change for him. But if the intelligence report was correct—which it had better be, or the men responsible would suffer his wrath—then this was indeed the most rational move to make. Without a doubt, it had the greatest probability of furthering his goals.

He took the stairs and avoided the bridge of the ship. Instead he walked to his cabin and shut the door. The engines rumbled as they ignited and prepared for takeoff. He and his men would arrive at the GenTexic facility within the next two hours. Either the results of the experiment would be successful, or he'd be looking for the twelfth program director in as many months. He was growing weary of incompetent scientists and inaccurate deadlines. It was fortunate that he had access to limitless funds or the constantly ballooning budget would have killed these experiments years ago. If the program wasn't on track now, he might as well shut the entire operation down. Why allow GenTexic to continue failing and squandering resources while he was out of touch for the next few years?

He grunted. The genetics program was the backup plan. In the end, it'd be more costly and take longer to restart it upon his return than to let the fools continue trying.

His body quivered with anger at the uselessness of those around him.

He thought of the one the soldier had called his son. He'd met the man just twice, both times when the soldier was a boy. Neither time had the boy known their relationship, only that he was meeting the supreme commander. The question remained: would the boy have the same drive he did? Time would tell, and quicker than the cadet expected.

Hanging his suit jacket in the small clothes locker, he next removed his gloves, followed by his tie and pin. He held the pin out before him. It was a reminder of what he sought to avoid. He'd also have to leave the symbol behind during his mission. He could take no risks with his identity being revealed.

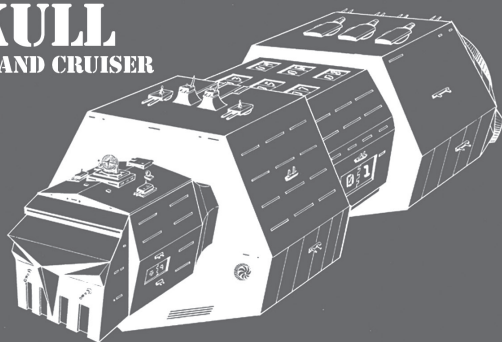
He pulled the paper from his pants' pocket and read the contents. "Very soon. Patience," he muttered to himself. A dark scowl came over his face as he looked at himself in a nearby mirror. "Eternity is mine."



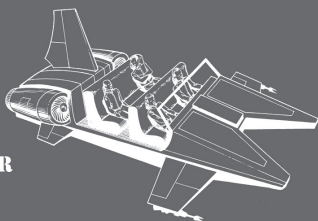
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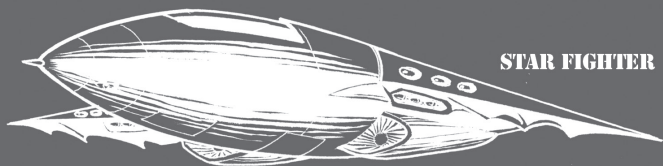
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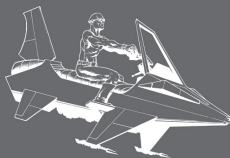
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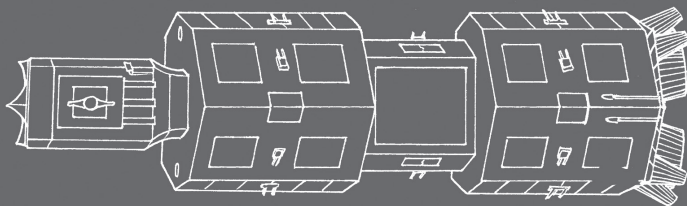
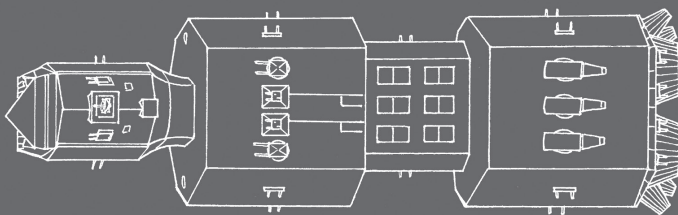
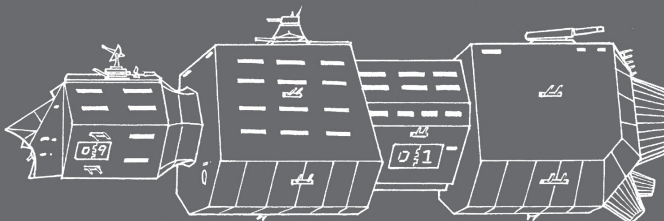


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**AND I GIVE UNTO THEM ETERNAL LIFE;
AND THEY SHALL NEVER PERISH.**

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**SKULL
COMMAND CRUISER**



Priceless

The word *priceless* echoed in Oliver's mind as he sat alone on the bridge of the *Phoenix*, pondering the last days' events. Running his fingers through his spiky brown hair, he felt his chest rise and fall as he took a long, soothing breath. It felt like the first real gulp of oxygen he'd taken since the quest had begun. The last few days had been both an adventure and a nightmare.

His parents were gone, snatched by the ruthless Captain Vedrik and his Übel soldiers. Oliver had fled at his dad's orders, taking his sister, Tiffany, and two twin brothers, Mason and Austin, with him. It was the first of three getaways they'd made. The second had separated them from Phelan O'Farrell, a wealthy benefactor of his parents' archeological work who had gifted them with the very star cruiser he now sat in. The third escape had been from an army of blue soldiers.

He shook his head. Blue men—how could that be? It hadn't been paint, and it wasn't some sort of body art; it was their actual skin color. Regardless, Oliver couldn't shake the sight of over a hundred of them with spears and torches, surrounding the ship, ready to attack.

And now here they were on course for the planet Evad. Oliver was certain that the Übel would take his parents, Elliot and Laura Wikk, there. That's where the clues led.

He pondered those facts. At the start of this whole adventure, Tiffany had discovered an entry in their mom's journal describing a recent excavation at Dabnis Castle. At the castle, their parents had uncovered several significant finds. The first was a small green globe with two inscriptions etched across its surface: the name of a planet, *Evad*, and two coordinates, neither of which were Evad's galactic location but which were possibly coordinates on the planet itself.

Alone, this discovery didn't warrant an immediate trip to the planet. However, when coupled with the next discovery, it suggested something significant awaited them there.

On the last day at Dabnis Castle, their parents had discovered an ancient book bound in crimson leather, the contents of which were unknown to Oliver. It was this very book the Übel Captain Vedrik had taken when he had abducted Oliver's parents. The captain had somehow known of the Wikks' discovery and called the book "priceless."

Priceless.

Mr. O'Farrell had said the Übel were "the wealthiest organization, save the Federation." So for something to be priceless to the Übel captain was significant. This only deepened Oliver's intrigue in what information the book might hold.

Rescuing his parents was Oliver's top priority, but how he would accomplish this goal was still in question. Without knowing much of their destination or how large Vedrik's contingent of soldiers was, Oliver couldn't conceive a thorough plan.

A lump formed in his throat. Of course, if his parents didn't go to Evad, or had already been and left, he had no idea how he'd find them. That fact, however, he could not and would not share with his sister and brothers. They clung to the hope of finding their parents.

Since the *Phoenix* was currently zipping through space in hyper flight, contacting Mr. O'Farrell was out of the question. At least Oliver and his siblings were safe, even if for just that moment.

Oliver tapped the screen to see the time remaining in hyper flight, and his mouth curled into a frown. Two hours might not seem like much, but under the circumstances it felt like an eternity. He involuntarily yawned and stretched as he stood from the pilot's seat. His sister and twin brothers had headed to the galley a few minutes ago and were waiting for him.

He stepped into the lavatory on his way and splashed a few handfuls of cool water onto his face. The mirror reflected a very different Oliver from the one who'd left to be a cadet at the Federal Academy nearly a year prior. He'd just turned seventeen but already dark stubble grew like moss on his squared chin by the end of each day. His brown eyes had dark rims from previous near-sleepless nights. His biceps were sore from the past days' trials, the last of which had taken place a mere half-hour before when he'd scrambled up the rope ladder to escape the horde of blue soldiers.

Looking in the mirror was like seeing his father.

He sighed and nodded. Oliver not only looked like an adult, he had to act like one.

“OLIVER, OLIVER. . . . COME IN, OLIVER!”

Risk it all! Join Oliver and the Wikk kids as they land the *Phoenix* on planet Evad and descend into its ancient jungle. Explore the ruins of a now-vanished civilization! Follow Oliver over the top, as he navigates a dizzying ride from the pinnacle of a ziggurat down into an underwater labyrinth! Dive into danger when Mason and Austin decide to go rogue and face the Übel! Will Tiffany and the e-journal help them escape the savage snares of invisible stalkers?

THE QUEST FOR TRUTH series follows the four Wikk kids in their desperate race to find the mysterious planet Ursprung and stop the Übel renegades from misusing its long-lost secrets. Ancient cities, treacherous villains, high-tech gadgets, the *Phoenix*—encounter all these and more on this futuristic, interplanetary adventure.

“*Risk* takes you on an exciting journey to the far reaches of the galaxy and explores the meaning of family and friends.”

—MARK REDEKOP, *Adventures in Odyssey Wiki*

“Brock writes with a passion that ignites his pen and drives the reader to burn through each page. . . . Untangle the mysteries within and become friends with the characters.”

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