

**MILLENNIUM
CHRONICLES**

BOOK 1

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Publishing

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Movie Length Book Publishers

Introduction

Our world has changed. Many people would rather watch a movie than read a book. Time constraints, hectic lifestyles, video games, and wonderful movie animations and graphics have all encouraged such a change.

Movie Length Book Publishers is committed to producing fantastic and adventurous books that can be read in the time it takes to watch a great movie. Creating a new Genre of books we look forward to this new adventure, because we believe there isn't a better movie screen or means of entertainment than the human imagination.

We hope MILLENNIUM CHRONICLES BOOK 1 will awaken others to the old, but new adventure in the wonderful realm of reading and exploration. We also look forward to publishing more books that can be read in a short amount of time that will inspire us for life.

CHAPTER 1

THE BEGINNING

She looked at her little baby shivering in the thin hospital garment. Rising from her chair she moved to sit next to him on the examination table. Her hands drew his small body close to her to keep him warm.

“Mommy?”

“Yes honey?” She responded softly.

“What are they going to do with me if I am the one?”

“Not a thing baby. They’re not going to do anything to you at all.”

To comfort him she repeated what she told him a dozen times. “Remember I told you that if you’re the one, then they will use your special code to help other babies.”

“How will they do that?”

She thought for a moment how she could describe First Trimester Genetic Patching to an eight year old. “Well, if a woman finds out she is going to be a mommy, then she will have a special procedure.

They will give her baby your special code, so when the baby is born the sun won’t hurt them. The baby will be just like you!”

“Does that mean other kids will be able to go outside and play in the daytime like me?”

She laughed. “Yes sweetie! People will be able to play, live and work in the daytime and it won’t make them sick. Just like you.”

The door to the room opened and the team of physicians and genetic researchers entered.

Dr. Natas had a smile on his face. “We have good news Miss Reese!” He said excitedly. “Contained in the D.N.A. strand of our little Joshua is one of the keys to humanities

salvation. We've determined that young Joshua is the perfect candidate."

The other physicians and researchers that accompanied the doctor into the room clapped their hands in approval and celebration of the announcement.

The young Doctor reached out and patted the little boy on the head. "Josh," bending over he looked into the young child's eyes, "you're going to be famous! People are going to remember you for a long, long time."

Looking at her son she asked, "So what now Doctor?"

The Doctor looked up at Miss Reese, then back to the child. "Now little Joshua will have the best of everything. You both will have the best of everything. I will see to that. All of us here are well prepared to protect our little investment."

Today

The events of that day played in his mind, as if they just happened yesterday.

If only his mother could have seen into the future, then she would never have let them examine him. She would never have let them use his DNA. She would never have let Doctor Natas take control of their lives.

Then again, he knew how hard his mother struggled to provide for her little family. She needed the money to endure the economic chaos of the times like everyone else. All she ever wanted was to give him the best of everything.

People will go to great lengths to survive. His mother was no exception. Could he really blame her?

He didn't blame her. She was a young single woman struggling to feed her family. She was in survival mode and Dr. Natas provided a way to alleviate all her worries and fears.

Doctor Natas, on the other hand, was a different story. The Doc knew what he had found in his DNA. It was the door to all of his selfish dreams of power and greed. He knew exactly what he was doing and he did blame him.

Josh was startled from his thoughts when a knock on the inside of his closed bathroom door caught his attention.

It was a signal that meant the children were ready for their lesson.

He knocked on his kitchen table twice in response. It let Rasha know he heard the signal and was coming.

Standing up from the table he walked over to the window near the sink to look out.

What he saw was nothing compared to the lush farmlands and wooded hillsides of his early childhood. It had become a sprawling barren landscape in comparison.

The climate changes, gamma rays, and solar flares had changed it so drastically over the years that it was beyond recognition compared to his earlier memories.

In the far distance the towering buildings of the world Capitol Megapolis Alpha loomed as it housed its placated masses.

Strewn between his old farm and the city were thousands of hydroponic green houses that fed the people of the large metropolis.

The sun reflecting off their glass made the wasteland before him look like a dead Christmas tree with strands of white lights. Megapolis Alpha was its star.

He couldn't count how many of the green houses he had destroyed over the years. Each one he smashed to the ground in retaliation for the injustices against his people.

Years ago he set the standard. If one Underworlder was killed, then two greenhouses were emptied and destroyed.

One Underworlder life taken would cost the Upperworlders of Megapolis Alpha the food supply for twenty of its people.

It really wasn't a fair trade. You can rebuild a green house and re-grow food, but you can't bring a human being back to life.

He didn't know if his policy ever prevented an Underworlder's death, but it let Doc and his UWH goons know they weren't getting away with the murder of innocent people without any consequences.

He walked from the kitchen window to the closed bathroom door from where the signal knock had originated.

Before he entered he gave one last look at the contents of the little farm house.

The day's electronic newspaper was displayed brightly on his reader. Dirty dishes filled the sink. His socks from the previous night lay on the floor. The sound of the steam washing machine hissed from the pantry. "Yes," he answered himself, "it has a lived in look."

It was all a charade of course. It was meant to fool the Upper World Headquarters in case they ever came to search the little farmhouse.

The ability for the old family homestead to fool any visitors was the least of his problems today. He was more concerned with how much longer they could continue to outwit the Upperworlder's advancing technologies.

He shuddered at the thought of the people in the Capitol waking up at this very hour to go to work on projects dedicated to locating and killing Underworlders.

He reminded himself of the few advantages he had in the situation.

The main one being he was the director of the whole UWH operation.

He had the final say over any technology to be designed and used.

His position also gave him many opportunities to personally sabotage their efforts before they even got off the ground.

But suspicions were growing. Many of them had been raised by his new personal assistant Dalton Graham.

Doc had placed him as his official aid in order to take some of the burden of his position off his shoulders. He had to find a way to get rid of him.

He opened the door and stepped into the windowless bathroom closing it behind him. He slid the door's lock into place and turned towards the bath tub.

Running his fingers along the edge of the tub closest to the wall he located the latch. With a pull the fastener released and the swish of the air pistons sounded. The huge claw foot tub lifted to rest on its side.

He stepped down into the large opening the bathtub had covered and onto the descending stairway below.

He laughed. This is what Dr. Natas and the UWH had been searching to find for sixty years; the entrance to the headquarters of the Underworlders.

It was right under their nose and they didn't have a clue that it was in the bathroom of the UWH's second in command.

This is where his people lived and breathed, worked and played. This is where his people who lived in the dark plotted and prayed they would never be found.

He stepped down far enough to close the tub without hitting his head. He pulled down hard on the strap welded to the tub's bottom until he heard the sound of the latch locking.

He had counted the number of steps in the carved out stairwell hundreds of times. It was one of the daily diversions that kept his mind occupied on other things besides his burdens and worries.

With one step he began the long descent. Each time the metal plated tip of his boots contacted a stone landing a hollow clank echoed through the stairwell.

There was just under a thousand winding steps of varying depths. There were 987 to be exact, and they led to large caverns over four hundred feet below the earth's surface.

When he reached the bottom Rasha was waiting.

She smiled at him. "That didn't take you long. I heard you enter the staircase after me. You caught up pretty quick."

"It's because I have longer legs than you do Rasha."

She chuckled and smiled. "You're working with the youth in classroom 2 today."

Joshua smiled in return and began to walk with her towards the class room. "Then we shouldn't keep them waiting."

Teaching in classroom 2 meant he would be in Brent's room.

His eyes had already adjusted to the dimly lit cavern. They kept the entire area dim for a reason. They had to keep energy and heat signatures low to avoid detection.

If they didn't, then satellite scanners or thermal earth thumpers could spot them quickly. It would mean the end of them all.

For obvious reasons there was only one room where a high amount of energy and heat was allowed. This was the greenhouse.

To keep scanners and thumpers from detecting the heat of the nursery they built it near a natural underground river. This was the standard building plan for all the Underworlder cities around the world

A special cooling canopy for the nursery routed the underground river's cold flowing water. It spread the cool liquid equally over its entire surface.

This kept thermo-sensors from picking up the heat signatures and pinpointing their location.

It served a dual purpose as well, because it also provided warm water for the baths.

The water flowed directly from the canopy to the baths. From the baths it was pumped back out through drain pipes to follow the natural course of the underground river.

It was this very same river that provided water for all of Megapolis Alpha.

Rasha cleared her throat. She already knew the answer to the question she was about to ask, but her unspoken fears and growing anticipation were getting the best of her again.

“How much longer do you think it will take Josh?”

Dr. Natas had asked him this question only yesterday. His answer to her would be the same answer he gave the Doctor, but for different reasons.

He told the Doctor it would end soon and the Underworlders would be located. He tried to assure him that the genetic misfits were running out of places to hide. It was a lie that sufficed the old man’s frustration for the moment.

“It won’t be much longer Rasha. She’s getting close to solving Genesis’ secret. Once we have it, then everything will change.”

Apologizing for her inquiry she said, “I know I am always asking you that question, but we have never been this close to our goal.”

“It’s alright. I think we’re all a little restless these days.”

They reached the carved out room of rock that served as classroom 2 and Joshua looked in through the small window of the metal door. His eyes canvassed the teens inside.

The room full of seventeen and eighteen year old students sat up straight when they saw him looking through the glass.

Today he was teaching the history of their survival, but tomorrow they would enter the battle for survival themselves creating their own history.

The odds were that half of them would not be alive in ten years because of stupid mistakes they would make. Many of them would only be remembered as a statistic of those lost in battle.

“I don’t see him Rasha. Where is he?”

She looked into the classroom. “I don’t see him either. He’s not in his seat.”

A voice from behind startled them. “Are you looking for me?”

Rasha quickly answered. “There you are Brent.” Thinking quickly she said, “Judicator Joshua didn’t want to start the lecture until everyone was present. Go on in and take your seat.”

“Yes Teacher Rasha.” The young man saluted her and Joshua then entered the classroom. The door closed behind him.

Rasha looked at Josh. “When are you going to tell him?”

“Sooner than I ever hoped I’m afraid. I wish I never had to tell him.

Becky is close to finishing the project and we need to get him in there soon if we’re going to pull this off.”

“I know you’re worried about their safety Josh.”

He looked at her, but couldn’t deny her observation. The truth is he was worried. The odds for Becky and Brent were slim, but they’ve all had to make sacrifices and take risks when the odds were against them. It’s the only thing that gave them the advantage at times.

Rasha recognizing the awkward silence looked at the ground and spoke. “Well, good luck professor. They’re all yours.”

Josh smiled at her. He was no professor, but he could teach some tough lessons every now and then. “No better time like the present.” He gave her an affirming touch on the shoulder.

She flinched at the contact and felt stupid. She wasn’t used to anyone touching her.

Again she apologized. “Sorry. I’m not used to spontaneous contact. When you’re done just send one of them over to the sanctuary to get me. I’ll be in prayer.” Rasha winked at him before turning to walk away.

He thought it was strange that faith in God came easy for her. He didn’t know why. If there was a God, then he had never seen any reason in their situation to believe a divine being cared about what they were going through.

He knew in what he could believe. He believed in being one step ahead of your opponent. He believed in striving for perfection, preparing for the worst, and hoping for the best. This had proved more valuable to him than any belief in a divine being.

Josh took a deep breath and centered himself as he opened the door to enter the classroom.

The talking inside the room hushed to silence. Closing the door behind him he walked over to Rasha’s desk, scooted an old text book to the side, and sat down.

There was a long period of awkward stillness, as the students stared and waited anxiously for him to begin.

With his thoughts gathered together he said, “I know that some of you will have some questions. I want you to wait until the end to ask them.

I also know that you’ve been taught most of what I am about to say in your studies, but I assure you that I’m going to offer you a different perspective than the watered down one you know.”

The students had only been taught what the teachers wanted them to know, but not the reality of the situation.

They had never been taught the pain, suffering, or anger that completed the story. They had never felt the injustice, or experienced the futility of life.

They were older now and they needed to know. They were going to need knowledge and experience that could change and inspire them if they were ever going to survive.

Facts were lifeless and unable to make a real impact. He had to make it personal for the students.

By manipulating the facts they had taught the teens a more palatable version of their history, but it could never inspire like hate, love, pride, hurt, and anger over the injustices endured.

They had never wanted the students to hate the Upperworlders for their situation and the things done, but if they were going to fight they would need something more than the watered down facts to drive them.

He had plenty of emotions and passion to share with them. He had plenty of anger to help ignite the lifeless facts into a cause that would impact their lives and motivate them to fight, and if necessary kill for their survival.

He began his lesson.

“Humanity in its selfish pursuit of wealth, ease, and progress raped our earth. They shamed her. They stole her life.

They robbed never thinking how their plunder and misuse of the world’s natural resources would affect our environment.

Selfishness sees and believes only what it wants for its own sake.” As Josh talked he allowed his anger and passion to grow stronger with every word. It was easy for him to tap into it, because he had so much within him.

“Greed and accumulation became a way of life for a small minority of the world.

The rest of the world lusted after this lifestyle and struggled to catch up to the technological advances and comforts of the industrial nations.

The upcoming crises caused by such aims became visible to only a few who cared enough to see what was happening.

This small minority saw the big picture of life on earth and the way it was catastrophically going to be changed if the world didn't alter its ways.

Some were able to see what we know today. We had dug our hole and now we were going to have to lie in it. It was too late.

When the science of the day began to predict terrible disasters looming over the horizon, it became clear that the world would soon know great devastation.

One catastrophe after another made life on earth increasingly unbearable.

I have lived long enough to experience the strange realization that the life that I once knew is only going to be known and experienced again in my memories." Josh became silent for a moment. It was a sad and sobering thought.

"Once people accepted they couldn't undo what had been done to the world, then humanity's focus changed.

They decided if they couldn't change the earth back, then they would change the human being to adapt.

They would genetically alter human life in order to survive in the unbearable conditions they had caused.

They began to search all of humanity for genetic anomalies. I was one of them. My skin could tolerate the burning and cancerous causing rays of space and the sun.

There was only one problem. The selfishness and greed that caused much of the world's predicament remained.

Only those who could afford to pay the huge price for survival were able to have their unborn children genetically treated.

People sold everything they had to see their children survive. In the end they sold control of their lives and their souls.

It left most of the world's wealth and lands in the hands of a few. This greedy minority are the ones who now own and rule the Upperworld. They run and shape it for their selfish benefit.

This is where all of you enter the picture. Your families were unable to afford the treatments. Within the span of ten years your families were seen as inferior to the new and improved human race.

Your ancestors were considered burdens hindering the welfare and recovery of the earth. Besides this, no one wanted their sons and daughters to mate with your grandparents, or parents, or even you.

If the new and improved human mated with an inferior human and the child was born without the enhanced modifications, then that child became an unwanted responsibility. It became a liability.

Many of the infants born to poor families were systematically murdered by the government, or taken to the desert to die by ashamed parents! These are practices that are still used today in the Upperworld!

Sometimes I still find newborns in trashcans and alleys!" By this time he knew he was fuming, but someone had to yell and get angry about the injustices that had been seen and experienced. Someone had to help them become angry about it too.

"This opened the door for worldwide hatred. A movement of hate to eradicate the inferior humans began!

The few who now owned the world pulled the strings and manipulated the people they owned. Billions of lives were lost.

All over the world the poor began to go into hiding and they became known as the Underworlders.

You are the descendants of these Underworlders. The Uppeworld still wants you dead, but we have something to say about this! We want to live!

We refuse to let the greedy rule us! They will not decide who lives and who dies, and as long as this world remains they will always have to deal with us!

Angrily he asked, "Are there any questions?"

The class looked scared and confused. He knew he was scheduled for an hour long lecture, but long speeches were not his style.

A young man in the back raised his hand. He was surprised that he didn't recognize him.

"What's your name young man?" Josh asked.

"I'm Andrew Judicator."

"What's your question Andrew?"

"Well, I've been thinking about this a lot lately. We are always told that we should focus on what's best for all of life in our actions.

We are also taught to be open in our thinking and to strive to see things from the point of view of others.

If what is best for humanity is to evolve, or even manipulate our evolution so that the human race can survive, then wouldn't it make sense in such drastic conditions to do what the Uppeworlders did?"

Josh's anger was ripe for this question. He knew how he was going to deal with this attitude and thinking. It wasn't the first time a youth posed a question like this.

He asked, "Do you have a best friend Andrew?"

Andrew smiled as he looked over to Jana. He had a crush on her that wouldn't stop. "Jana is my friend."

The classroom erupted into laughter. They all knew he was infatuated with her.

Josh lifted up his pant leg and pulled out a small weapon from a holster on his leg. "Let's follow your line of reasoning Andrew."

He quickly walked over to the young girl and placed the tip of the weapons barrel up to her head. She shrieked and the classroom turned into a tumult of screams and movement.

Josh screamed at the top of his lungs. "Sit down and shut up!"

The room became silent as fear took them captive. The youth had heard many stories concerning the Judicator. He was to be respected and dreaded. He was ruthless and a killer of traitors.

This added truth to all they had heard.

The young girl began weeping profusely.

"Calm down Jana. I'm not going to hurt you. I'm the one who wants you to live remember." The young girl must have believed him, because she began to settle down.

"Now Andrew, would you like to come over here and take care of this genetic misfit. After all, by your reasoning, it would be the best thing for humanity if we just shot her dead on the spot."

He continued, "You're a genetic misfit too Andrew. Maybe afterward you can put the gun up to your own head and help take care of this problem for the good of all."

Andrew didn't know what to say. It had made sense to him before, but now he understood.

Josh removed the pistol from the girls head and placed it back into its holster. He then returned back to Rasha's desk where he sat down.

“Jana, what were you thinking when I placed the gun to your head?”

She stuttered for a moment. “I was thinking that I want to live.”

Turning his gaze to the young boy he asked, “What were you thinking Andrew?”

Andrew paused. “I was thinking...” He paused longer this time. “I was thinking of how I could stop you.” His head dropped.

Jana had stopped crying. Wiping her face she stared at Andrew.

Josh shook his head. He had proved his point. “The desire to live and our ability to love others and care about them are what make us human.

No one should have the power to take these rights away from us. No matter how much some people think we are unworthy of both.”

As he finished these words his watch began to vibrate. Its frequency was aligned to sensors on the road leading to the farm house. Someone was coming!

“Jana, I need you to go to the sanctuary and get Rasha. I’ll have to finish this lesson later.”

Josh ran from the classroom to the stairwell leading up to his bathroom.

He wrapped his arms around a bar suspended over the entranceway and held on tight. He then kicked a lever on a nearby wall.

The lever released a lock to a spring loaded pulley system that catapulted him up the stairs to the top of the landing. The whole process took thirty seconds. He had less than five minutes before the visitors arrived.

He dropped from the bar, unlatched the tub, and made his way into the bathroom. Josh pushed the tub closed and turned on the water.

He quickly undressed and put on his bathrobe. Walking over to a shelf in the bathroom he turned the radio on and cranked up the volume.

Unlocking and opening the bathroom door he walked into his kitchen. He could see an outline of a person through the white curtains that covered the front door window. He controlled his escalated breathing as he walked to the front room.

He unlocked and opened the door. Laughing and shocked he said, "Well if it isn't Doctor Natas himself and two of his elite UWH goonies."

Smiling he unlocked the screen and opened it for them to enter. "Come on in Rob. Just let me turn off my radio and water."

As he walked to the bathroom he began to wonder what in the world was so important to bring the paranoid old man out in the open.

He switched off the radio and closed the water valve. Wiping the sweat from his face with his bathrobe, he then took a few deep breaths.

Returning to the living room he noticed Rob had sat down in the plush easy chair. The goons had stayed on the porch and the front door was closed.

"So tell me Rob, what brings you out this way?"

The Doctor looking frustrated said. "I wish you'd level this place. You know I worry about your safety out here.

You're like a sitting duck for the Underworlders. Besides, you have a beautiful house in the city. Why do you hold on to this dump?"

Josh smiled, "I know it's a dump, but it's my own personal and private dump away from it all. Besides, there are a lot of memories of mom here.

It's the perfect place for privacy and you and I both know Underworlders don't take lives; they take our food."

"That may be so, but I believe that you and I are most definitely exceptions to that rule."

The old man frowned, but it didn't last long. The frown was soon replaced by a huge smile. "Now for the reason I came. I have news and I couldn't wait! I wanted to tell you in person!"

Josh knew it must be important if the old man risked his own neck to come here. "Don't keep me in suspense. Let it out!"

"We've got them Josh!"

Josh's heart felt like it dropped in his chest as it began pounding rapidly. "What do you mean?"

The Doctor smiled. "Earlier this morning at the water plant one of the filter screens for the incoming water became clogged."

"That's nothing new to us. The screens get clogged all the time."

"Yeah, but this time there was something else in the clog." The doctor reached into his pocket and pulled out a small child's bath toy.

Josh's heart wanted to leap out of his chest. He recognized the toy. All of the young children played with them in the baths. "I don't get it Rob."

"Think Josh. What in the world would a small child's bath toy be doing in an underground river?"

To make sure that my suspicions were right and this wasn't a left over product of a world long gone, I asked them to test the incoming water. Do you know what we found?"

“What? Tell me!” He asked excitedly to keep up the charade and mask the horror that was subduing him.

“Human feces, chemicals, skin cells and we even found human hair!”

The Doctor looked as if he had just hammered the final nail in the coffin of his enemy.

“They are tapped into the underground river somewhere. I don’t know why we hadn’t thought of this possibility before!”

He began to whisper. “I think that it might possibly be an underground cavern around the water way.

All we need to do is follow the river underground doing echo tests, find a large cavern capable of holding a small population of people, and Walla! We have found the bastards!”

Josh had to say something to convince the old man of his approval. “No more searching for a needle in haystack. It will just be a matter of time!”

Rob jumped up from the chair. “That’s exactly it my son! I know it’s your day off, but I figured you would want to come in and start the search right away! I couldn’t wait. I had to tell you myself. No one has waited for this day like you and I have.”

“You’ve got that right!” Josh said as he continued the charade. “I’ll get cleaned up and head out immediately!”

The old man walked towards him and gave him a big hug. He returned the gesture secretly in disgust.

“Join me for dinner tonight to celebrate! In fact, let’s go all out. Let’s have a huge party and invite everyone so we can tell them the good news!”

“You better be ready to party old man. If we’re going to celebrate, then let’s do it right. This is a great day!”

The Doctor laughed. “I’ll do my best. I can still hang with the best of them you know.”

“You sure can Rob.”

He watched as the old man walked to the door to leave.

“It’s a good day Josh. No. It’s a great day!” Rob closed the door behind him.

Josh whispered, “That’s a matter of opinion old man.”

He stood waiting until his watch vibrated again to let him know his visitors had left the property. Walking to the front door he flipped the lock closed.

Dropping to his knees he let the pent up emotions roll out. Tears poured from his eyes.

They should have thought of this! How could they have been so careless? How could they have missed this possibility? He would wait until tonight to pass on the bad news to the community.

They would have to act quickly. The Genesis project was their only hope. They would have to put their plan into motion sooner than anticipated.

They were not ready, but they had to take the risk. It was their only hope.

He began to think of his reasoning for not killing the old man when he had the chance. He reminded himself that he would be no better than Doc if he did.

Josh’s thoughts turned to the party tonight. The old man never did anything on a small scale. He would pull some strings at the party to get Brent inside the city and university.

If that didn’t work, then there was always the back-up plan.

They would just break into the city.

This meant he would have to tell Brent the truth. He would have to tell them all the truth. Time was up.

Softly he muttered, “I beg to differ with you Doc. This is a bad day. No. This is a very, very bad day.”

He stood to his feet and walked to the bathroom. He didn’t put the plug in the tub’s drain, so there was no water to empty.

He wiped his face and composed himself as he pulled the lever for the latch. The tub rose to its side.

Standing on the steps below were Rasha and Luke his second in command. Both of them had a look of concern on their face.

“Do we have trouble?” Luke asked.

Josh nodded. “It was our good friend the Doctor.”

Rasha gasped. “Why? He has never come here!”

“A child’s toy was found in one of the city’s incoming water plant screens. They tested the water and found traces of human feces, chemicals, skin and human hair. They’ve got us. Time is up.”

“Oh’ no!” Rasha blurted out as she dropped onto one of the steps. She began to softly cry.

Josh looked to Luke. “Have the people gather in the sanctuary tomorrow morning. They need to know. Send for one of the replacements. We’ll have to move quickly.”

He then looked to Rasha. “Bring Brent to me tonight. It’ll be late. Natas is throwing a party and I’ll have to attend, but I have to tell him tonight. Make sure he brings what he needs.”

CHAPTER 2

TRAITOR

Stepping into the Helios Transport he flicked the switch allowing the solar cells to direct energy to the drive.

This was one of his favorite inventions. He loved watching the engineers bring it to life. He had to admit that his idea for making every inch of paint on the Helios vehicle solar cells was genius. He patted himself on the back.

It took years, but a fossil fuel free vehicle was worth every minute and amount invested. It wasn't the fastest thing in the world, but it worked.

He listened as the drive turned and picked up speed. The centrifugal switch clicked and the *Ready to Drive* LED lit up.

He placed both of his thumbs on the pads located on the steering wheel. The car scanned his prints. The Helios began to move after indicating a positive identification.

The only bad thing about the design was the unit's light weight construction. Bumps usually sent the entire unit hopping into the air and a strong gust of wind could blow it over if no one heavy was inside.

Strong currents were always in the forecast, since there were no trees to block the wind. It also kicked up brutal dust storms that made seeing where you were going impossible.

He knew the path from his house to the city well. He practiced driving it with his eyes closed many times. By getting a feel for the difference between the road and the rough grounds he learned how to drive sightless.

You never knew when your vision was going to be impaired by a dust storm, so he was prepared for such an emergency.

It made the trip interesting, but that isn't the only reason behind his decision to learn the path without his vision. He

wanted to be prepared for when he might have to drive the route wounded, or in complete darkness.

Before he left the house Doc sent him a message telling him the celebration started at nine. He also told him that he made it mandatory for all public leaders and teachers to attend.

The honor of announcing the good news to the esteemed guests belonged to him.

His mind began racing as he went over his plans. For all situations he had a plan and a back-up plan.

If both options to secure the Genesis energy source failed, then they were all in trouble. He didn't have a third plan to work with.

Then again, plan three could be kill Doc, but that wasn't as easy as some believed.

The Genesis project was the only thing of value that the Doc really cared about. If he could gain control of its power, then he could control Rob.

What was really bothering him was thinking how Brent might respond to the truth. It's hard to know what his response will be when he realizes that he has been deceived all of his life.

The size of Megapolis Alpha loomed larger and larger as he approached. Its size never ceased to amaze him.

He soon could see the outline of the giant sign outside of the main gate that read, "Megapolis Alpha: The Largest City on Earth."

It was true, but the size of the city couldn't compare to the ancient cities of Los Angeles, Dallas, Tokyo or New York.

In fact, most of the earth's population either died off from the solar flares, gamma rays, starvation, or were lost during the UWH genocide of the poor.

He looked at the dozens of slits and square openings along the height and width of the city gate.

He knew each one had soldiers and artillery ready to defend the city from an attack. No Megapolis had ever been attacked. The UWH owned and controlled the world, but they took no chances.

He took his thumbs off the pads on the steering wheel and the vehicle came to a slow stop. Zipping his window down the guard approached with a wireless finger print pad.

“Good evening Judicator. Please log in.”

He placed his middle digit on the pad and the LED lit for a positive ID.

“Very good sir. Welcome back.”

He watched as the guard motioned for the gate to open. The large steel doors retracted revealing the city’s central road.

Pressing his thumbs again on the key pads the Helios moved through the massive opening.

The structure and functionality of the city still awed him. Every inch was designed with purpose and efficiency in mind.

Located in the center of the city were the University and Hospital, the Food and Clothing Distribution Center, The Maintenance Building, the Doc’s house, his house, and the UWH’s world office.

Everyone in the city worked in one of these buildings, except for his house.

The Doc had tried to get him to let a few of the citizens serve as house help, but the risk was too great. Besides Becky lived there and kept up with all the cleaning and cooking. It was one less situation he had to be concerned about.

The rest of the city consisted of living centers, entertainment areas and rest facilities.

One of the changes he most approved of when they designed life in the city was that entertaining, or sports would no longer be considered working professions.

If you entertained or played sports, then you did it as a hobby, or for fun, and you did it for free and on your own personal time.

The world before the climate change and natural disasters used to pay entertainers more money than they paid teachers, law enforcers, and physicians. To him it was more evidence of the mixed up priorities that led to the world's ultimate downfall.

The central road from the main gate led straight to the UWH world office.

Driving closer he came into view of the Doc's house. All the lights were on and it looked as if Doc had begun the party early. Helios transports and people surrounded his house.

Doc would wait until the last minute to show up to the UWH Celebration Center, but he wouldn't waste one second in beginning the party early.

His house set on the opposite side of the road and looked the exact opposite of Doc's. It looked dark, dreary, and abandoned.

Becky spent almost every waking moment at the University working on her mother's equations and testing her theories.

It would be the last and final attempt to tap into the Genesis Stasis Cell. They couldn't make any mistakes this time.

The last time they tried to tap into the cell it destroyed half of the university and hundreds of people lost their lives.

If they made any errors in the calculations this time, then all indications pointed they were likely to destroy the entire planet.

Becky probably received an invitation to the party, but he doubted she would leave the lab for something so pointless.

Mandatory or not, Becky had above the law privileges. She also had other privileges no one else knew about. Privileges he and his wife genetically designed for her and Brent to have. Privileges no one could even begin to imagine.

They were his children, but they were something far more than human beings. He considered them to be divine implants into a dead world.

He still struggled with whether or not it was right to tinker with the natural order of things. Only time would tell if their decision was the right or wrong one. They would either save the world, or they would destroy it in the process.

He pulled into his driveway and drove around to the back of the house where he parked.

Exiting the Helios he walked up the steps leading to the back door. Placing his palm against the pad the door unlocked and the entire house came to life.

The computer's voice greeted him as he entered. "Good evening Joshua."

"Esther. Good evening to you. End."

"Joshua. What are your instructions?"

"Esther. I will need my Tuxedo and undergarments. I will also be using the Shower. End."

"Joshua. You have seventy three messages."

"Esther. Are any of those messages from Becky? End."

"Joshua. There is one message from Becky."

"Esther. Play message from Becky and transfer all other messages to office. End."

"Joshua. Request completed."

He moved to one of the house speakers and awaited Becky's message. "Hello dad." Her voice sounded excited. "Once I received word of the party I knew Doc wouldn't celebrate without his right hand man at his side.

I heard the news Dad. You know I feel the same as you do right now. Nevertheless, it's great timing, because I'm at my wits end! No strands of hair left! See you soon!"

His heart began to beat. He couldn't believe what he heard.

“Wits end” was their code for the calculations are finished. “No strands” was code indicating that she is ready to attempt connection to the Genesis Stasis Cell.

He was going to have to work and work fast. She was right. The timing couldn't have been better. Take that one Doc!

Since he didn't get the chance to take a bath at the farm house he hurried to his bedroom. Esther had already ejected his vacuum packed tuxedo and undergarments from the storage unit.

He quickly undressed throwing his clothes into the laundry bin. Esther opened the chute at the bottom emptying the basket. They would be cleaned and placed into vacuum storage.

He walked into the bathing cylinder and shut the door. He closed his eyes. “Esther. Clean. End.”

For one minute he was sprayed with a warm mist mixture of soap and water.

“Esther. Rinse. End.” He rushed to rinse in the same amount of time.

“Esther. Dry. End.” The blast of warm air almost took his breath away.

He unlatched the shower and walked to the mirror to brush his hair. Julie's picture stared him in the face. He missed her so much and the wave of emotions he was feeling reminded him of this truth.

She was the only woman he had ever loved. No matter how hard he had tried to save her, her health continued to fail.

Eventually his attempts at trying to save her led him to the invention of the Nano-Cell Bots. Unfortunately Julie had passed away before they could be of any help to her.

Julie knew the risk she was taking, but she made the ultimate sacrifice. She gave her life, so the world could have hope. She wilted away before his eyes.

Giving birth to Brent and Becky was too much for her system to handle. It was the equivalent of giving birth to twelve pounds of refined plutonium. He missed her. He was so proud of her sacrifice.

“Esther. Play video of Julie. End.”

His mirror instantly turned into a holographic viewing screen. Tears ran down his face as he watched the video he had taken years ago of her sleeping.

Her breathing was smooth. Her chest rose in and out.

He touched the screen as if he were touching her beautiful hair that flowed over her pillow. He touched the screen where her hand rested on her stomach. She was holding her twins the only way she would ever be able to hold them.

Looking at her made him feel everything was right in the world. How he wanted to hold her again and smell her hair and caress her face.

This is how he liked to imagine her. Asleep for now, but he hoped deeply that he would see her again. He hoped deeply that the afterlife she believed in was true.

He was tempted many times to genetically clone her, but it wouldn't have been the same. He didn't want a clone of her that didn't recognize him. He didn't want her absent of the memories they shared. He wanted his Julie.

Sobbing he said, “Esther. Stop video of Julie. End.” The mirror returned and he felt sorry for the man he saw crying in the mirror. “What a punk you are! Shrug it off!”

“Joshua. Incoming call from Doc.”

Speaking to himself he said, “Get a grip Josh.” He gathered his composure. “Esther. Answer. End.”

“Hello Doc!” He tried to sound happy.

“There's my boy! I saw your lights on and knew you were back. Are you ready for the celebration of your life?”

“No, that day will come when the Underworlders are in our hands.” It made him sick to say it, but the old man loved to hear things like that.

“That’s what I like to hear!” Doc laughed. “On a more serious note I just wanted to tell you that I am needed in my office right away.

It appears that we have a traitor in our midst. I’m going to hear the case tonight.

You should probably stop by when you’re finished with the opening of our event. I think this one will be of interest to you.”

“Sure thing Doc. I’ll see you there.” His mind immediately began to ask questions.

“Esther. Stop call. End.”

Why would this one be of interest to him? A traitor? All he could think of was Becky.

It couldn’t be Becky. She’s too smart to get caught. Then again she isn’t perfect. It only takes one mistake to ruin a great plan.

Another possibility is that an Underworlder spy may have been caught. That could be a big problem. Doc knows how to get information from people whether they want to give it or not.

An Underworlder spy has never been caught alive, but that doesn’t mean it could never happen.

He quickly dressed into his tuxedo. Grabbing his handheld monitor he stuck it in the jackets inside pocket. He opened the top drawer of his dresser and withdrew two hand held weapons that he tucked into the nape of his back.

He liked these more than the little pee shooter he sometimes wore on his leg. He left it on the night stand.

Doc carried the same type of weapon for protection, but he carried it in case he needed to defend himself from an enemy attack.

He carried weapons in case he ever found the nerve to try and kill Doc, or defend himself against UWH goons. He hoped they wouldn't be needed tonight.

He walked out of his front door. "Esther. Lock house. End." The computer shut down all signs of life.

He stood for a few moments in the shadows of his front porch watching the intellectually elite filed in line at the front of the UWH building.

Figuring he had wasted enough time he stepped out of the darkness and into the light. Everyone seemed to take notice of him all at once.

He and the Doc couldn't go unnoticed anywhere in the world for long. It was unfortunate.

As the citizens waited for the guards to check their ID prints and personal effects they greeted him as he walked by.

Nearing the gate he was startled when a young guard stepped in front of him.

"Halt sir. You will have to go to the end of the line and through security like everyone else."

He raised his eyebrows. Maybe there were some out there who didn't recognize his face. It was either this, or the kid forgot to read his manual.

He was about to make an example of the young man when a flash out of the corner of his eye caught his attention.

One of the more experienced guards standing nearby raised his weapon in the air and jammed the butt of it down hard into the base of the young guard's neck. The force of the blow knocked the lad to the ground.

Shrieks were heard from the crowd.

The older guard screamed, "You idiot! Don't you know who this is? This is Judicator Joshua!"

Josh stepped forward. "It's alright Centurion."

"Yes Sir." The guard stood to attention.

Josh looked down at the young soldier. He looked a little dazed and confused from the blow. Reaching down he grabbed underneath the young man's arm and lifted him to his feet.

"Are you alright son?"

"Yes sir. I'm sorry sir. It's getting dark and I don't see very well at night. It's my first day. I didn't recognize you."

"I see. What's your name?"

"My name is Crawler Second Class Benton Sir."

"Crawler Benton I want you to head to the hospital and make sure you are alright."

"I'm O.K. sir."

"I wasn't asking if you were O.K. Crawler Benton. I was giving you an order."

"Yes Sir!"

He watched as Benton ran in the direction of the hospital.

Looking to the Centurion whom he had known for years he said, "Next time Centurion Walker let me handle my own business. I'm a big boy.

If you do this again, then I might take it as an insult to my ability to handle my own affairs. Do I make myself clear?"

The Centurion smiled and responded. "Yes Sir!" He was a good friend of Josh's. They had worked many long nights together and created a strong bond. This was the Judicator's way of giving thanks for watching out for him.

"Get back to business Centurion Walker."

The Centurion winked at Josh. "Yes Sir." He also realized Josh was putting on a show for the crowd.

A few people from the crowd clapped. Apparently they approved of the way he handled the situation.

He walked through the UWH gates pass the check points and through the building's double glass doors that had been wedged open. There he was met by his nose assistant Dalton Graham.

“Good evening Judicator.”

“Good evening Dalton.”

“You are expected to give a speech upon your arrival. Upon completion of the speech Doctor Natas has asked me to remind you that your presence is requested in his office concerning an important matter.”

“Very good Dalton.”

“Sir, other matters need your attention. I have called your monitor and your house on a number of occasions, but only received your message center...”

“Dalton?”

“Yes sir?”

“When I said that I did not want to be disturbed for two days what did you hear me say?” He watched as a look of frustration appeared on his assistant’s face.

“Maybe we need to go over my instructions for you again concerning what to do when you can’t reach me. Repeat them again for me.”

He echoed what the Judicator had told him numerous times. “If I cannot reach you, then I can wait until you return my call and if you don’t respond to me that day, then you will get with me the next day, or the next day, or the next day.”

“Very good Dalton! I always knew you were a bright lad. Are we finished?”

“Yes sir. Do you need me for anything else sir?”

“No Dalton your excused for the rest of the night, but I do have one thing I need you to do.”

Dalton perked up. “What is that sir?”

“Have fun! I swear if I come downstairs with Doc and you’re not having fun I’m going to shoot you on the spot!” Dalton’s face took on a look of concern and worry. “I’m just kidding Dalton! Go away.”

“Yes sir.”

He walked past his assistant into the celebration room. People were jammed inside elbow to elbow. He knew when Doc saw this crowded confusion there would be a new building project on the docket.

As the population grew, then so did the leaders and teachers and the need for more space to house and entertain them.

He pressed his way through the crowd giving informal welcomes and greetings. Reaching the podium he spoke into the microphone calling for everyone's attention.

"I need everyone to quiet down for a moment."

When things hushed he opened the celebration ceremony.

"Good evening." The crowd responded with the same greeting.

"Many of you are probably wondering about the reason for our last minute call to a celebration this evening.

Then again I know many of you and you don't need any particular reason to celebrate at all." Chuckles came from the crowd.

"Tonight, though, we do have a reason. It is a very good reason to celebrate.

Many of you know that we have spent much of our efforts over the last sixty years focusing on new sources of energy and locating the Underworlders who have pillaged and destroyed our store houses.

Tonight we are one great step closer to accomplishing one of these goals. New evidence has narrowed the Underworlders location."

The crowd burst into cheers.

Josh waited for them to quite down. "We believe that within a few months, possibly a few weeks, we will uncover their location and put an end to their destructive tirades upon our lives.

In a few months we will have placed an end to their efforts at hindering us in the restructuring of life on planet earth.

We will help this dead world live again by removing one of the last obstacles that has stood in its way of recovery.”

The crowd erupted into cheers and chants yelling out the phrase, “Death to the Underworlders.” It made his stomach turn.

He gave them Doc’s propaganda, but he didn’t agree or believe in anything that he just said.

Looking upon the shouting crowd he hoped the opposite. He hoped that within a few months that Megapolis Alpha would be forced into a position to make peace with all Underworlders and accept their right to live and be free as any Upperworlder.

Looking at the hands of the crowd waving in the air he believed the Underworlders were more deserving of the right to live and be free than any of those calling for their death.

Most Upperworlders were people medically manufactured and genetically manipulated by the choice of the few. To nature they were unnatural, unplanned, and uninvited implants into the ecological system of the world.

Thinking this way was always troublesome to him. It made him wonder what this made Becky and Brent.

They had been genetically restructured, but in his mind they were on a different side of the same coin and that made all the difference in the world.

They were manufactured to save the natural order of human life.

He ended the cheers and chants that were sickening him with a raise of his hand. “So tonight celebrate and be thankful and let this night be remembered for all time!”

The crowds erupted into cheers again and continued the chant of death. He felt nauseous.

Waving he hurried his way through the crowd and found Dalton waiting for him in front of the elevator that led to Doc's office.

"What is it Dalton?"

"Do you mind if I ask you a personal question?"

Angrily he responded. "What?"

"Don't you hear them sir? They are shouting death to the Underworlders. I just wonder why you never join in such chants."

"I don't have to Dalton! My responsibility is to get the cheering started by giving the people something to cheer about. That's why I am their leader. In fact I don't like what your insinuating!

Come to think of it I've never seen you join in the people's death chants to the Underworlders. I wonder what I should think of this fact. What do you have to say for yourself?"

Dalton began shouting the death chant as he stepped out of the Judicator's way.

The guards pressed the button opening the elevator. Josh stepped in and turned. Dalton had moved in front of the doors continuing his chant.

He smiled at him as the elevator closed shutting out the sickening sounds.

Giving a sigh of relief he took comfort in the thought that one way or another it would all be over very soon.

The elevator sped up to Doc's office on the top floor. He was nervous. Was he stepping into a trap? Had they found out that he was a traitor? Did they have Becky? He felt the butts of his own weapons on the nape of his back. He didn't want to ever use them, but he would if he was backed into a corner.

The doors swung open and instantly he noticed two Crawlers. Each soldier was on either side of a young man. They held his arms firmly. Dr. Natas was behind his desk smiling.

“Ahhh! Just the man I was waiting to see. Judicator, since this case concerns you, I want you to pass judgment on this traitorous worm.”

Josh walked over to Doc’s desk so he could get a better look at the young man. He was actually relieved when he didn’t recognize him.

“Tell Judicator Joshua what you have done traitor!” Doc looked at Josh and winked.

The young man had tears streaming down his face. He shook and jerked as he opened his mouth to talk. “I have been accused of being a traitor Judicator Joshua, but I am only a thief and a liar like most men and women in this city.

I work in the hospital. Four years ago my wife gave birth to a son. He was tested and found to be missing the Photo Gene. Part of my job at the hospital is to dispose of the babies missing the gene.

The doctors and nurses didn’t know the child was mine. I couldn’t dispose of my own son Judicator, so I took him and hid him in my home.

My wife and I did our best to hide and feed him using our rations and vitamins, but my wife died two months ago and my best was no longer good enough.”

Josh’s heart was breaking, but he couldn’t let Doc see it in his face. He held back the tears and kept a straight face as the man burst into sobs.

“My rations and vitamins weren’t enough for us both. Our rations are so small these days.

Today I lied to get into the food warehouse. I forged a note saying I was sent to pick up daily rations for a patient. They knew I was lying.

I was caught taking the food from your bin Judicator. I thought the portions in your bin would be larger, and they were. I’m sorry Judicator, but my child’s hunger left me no choice.

I ask for mercy. I may be a liar and a thief and I admit to being a law breaker, but I am not a traitor to the UWH.”

Doc let out an “hmpff” sound that expressed his disgust. “I beg to differ. Every time you break one of our laws you little worm you are betraying the UWH. Nevertheless, we have already seized the child and put it to death, as it should have been done four years ago.”

Josh watched as the news of the son’s death caused the man to crumble to the floor in sobs.

The man screamed in agony as the guards lifted him back up on his feet. Josh fought off the urge to grab his weapons and blast Doc between the eyes for his heartless crimes against fellow human beings.

“What is your judgment Judicator?” Doc waited for a response with a smirk on his face.

Josh carefully chose his words. “My judgment is that the loss of his wife and son, and the fact that he will have to live with the pain, suffering and torment that his mistake has caused him is punishment enough.

I also command an investigation into my ration portions compared to the portions of our citizens. I want nothing more than what I expect our people to live on.

Let him bare the mark of traitor for one month and feel the shame and scorn of the people he lied to and stole from. I reserve the right to decide whether further punishment is due at that time.”

He kept from looking directly at Doc. He wasn’t sure how Doc would respond to his judgment.

“Take him away.” Doc shooed the guards with his hand.

Josh watched as the prisoner looked up to face him. His expression asked why. It was then that he knew the man would have rather faced death than live with his losses.

Josh looked at Doc and could tell that Doc understood this, because he was grinning wide. His long grin meant he took great joy in the punishment and anguish this man was enduring.

Doc waited until the elevator doors closed before he said something. "I admit Joshua that I was stunned by your judgment, but now I see the wisdom behind your decision.

His suffering will be a witness to all those who would even think of doing such a thing.

I just hope he doesn't kill himself before the people can get a good dose of his misery."

Doc then hit his communicator and a guard responded on the other end.

"Yes sir."

"Concerning the traitor you just took. Take him before the crowd downstairs and make an example of him.

Also, keep a suicide watch on him. I don't want him to kill himself before the people can see his traitorous misery.

Tomorrow morning drag him through the streets and let the people see him weeping.

Pull his son from the trash heap and place him on a cart in front of him. Let him push it through the streets. I want the people to see the results of his decision to break the law.

That should get some tears out of him and get the people's attentions. After that I don't care. You can let him go."

Josh was sickened by what he heard. The old man was sick. He was in power and he meant to keep it that way.

Doc smiled. "Now that's over with let's get to the party!"

Josh hesitated as Doc rose and headed toward the elevator door. He then spoke. "There is something else that I need to speak to you about." Doc looked at him surprised.

"What is it Josh? Is everything alright?"

"Doc, you have another traitor that you have to deal with tonight."

Doc looked confused. “What are you talking about Joshua?”

“Many years ago you sent me on missions across the globe as an ambassador to the nations.”

He paused to look at Doc and he certainly had the old man’s attention. “During that time I was away from Julie for months. During that time I betrayed her. I was a traitor to her.”

The old man let out a sigh of relief. “Is that what this is about? My son that’s all in the past now. We all do things we regret in time. Besides when we’re young we have a lot of wild oats to sow.” Doc’s eyebrows furled. “Why are you bringing this all up now?”

Josh hesitated. “Doc I recently found out that I have a son by another woman.”

“What? When?”

“I received this message by courier at the farm house.” Josh took out a folded letter from his pocket.

“You’re kidding! Someone sent you a letter? Let me see this!”

He handed the letter to Doc. “I know. I was even more surprised than you. I almost dropped over when I read what it said.” He watched as Doc’s eyes scanned the note.

“Why didn’t you tell me this news when I was at the farm house today?”

“The good news you brought pushed everything to the side I suppose.

I had been beating myself up over it for the past few days. I don’t think I was ready at the time to tell you anyway, even if I had remembered.”

“I thought you looked a little pale this morning. Josh if this letter is true, then it looks like your son is on his way to live with you!

This is good news my lad. You’ve always wanted a son and now you have one.

In fact I will personally raise him like my own grandchild just like I did with Becky. This isn't a reason to mourn. It's another reason to celebrate!"

Doc thought and then nodded, "You know maybe this will give you some of that pep back that you lost when Julie passed away."

Josh nodded. "Maybe you're right Doc."

"Lad, I know I'm right! You've got preparations to make. Our son is coming home!"

Josh secretly smiled inside. Everything was working according to the plan. Now he had to deal with Brent.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT IS REAL?

He pulled up to his farm house. He was concerned that the backup batteries would drain before he arrived, but they didn't.

It wasn't like he didn't have a backup plan. He had mounted foot pedals that connected to a chain and gear drive system on the passenger side in case of electrical failure.

It would have been a hard ride even with it geared for easy pedaling, but he would have eventually arrived.

Looking at his watch he noticed that it was five twenty in the morning. The sun would be up soon. He was so glad that he memorized the route home with his eyes shut.

Tonight it had helped, because the moon and the stars weren't anywhere to be seen through the mist.

He rubbed his dry and itching eyes and exited the Helios. He was so tired. Stretching as he stood to his feet he became glad he was sober.

Doc kept pushing drinks in his hand and he kept pouring them into plants and other people's cups.

He was glad when the old man passed out. He left him a note saying he was going to check and see if his son had arrived at the farm house yet, and that he would be back later.

He told Rasha to have Brent ready when he returned. He imagined they were all passed out on the stairwell, but if they were like him, then they would be too worried to sleep.

Josh took a step towards the porch when his watch began to vibrate. There was an intruder on the property. He quickly

pulled one of his weapons from the small of his back and threw himself under the Helios for cover.

He waited patiently looking in all directions. Ten minutes passed before he caught sight of a lone figure darting around his barn and running towards his house. As the figure jumped into his shrubs near the front porch Josh yelled out.

“Halt! I am armed and you are in my line of sight. Come out of the bushes, or I will fire upon you!”

“Don’t shoot! I’m Carmen! I’m the Replacement!”

Josh took a deep breath and rested his head on his hands.

He crawled out from under the Helios and returned his weapon to the small of his back. “Carmen what if I was a non-friendly?”

The older teen emerged from the bushes. “I don’t know. I didn’t think about that.”

“Lucky for you I’m not.” He walked over and shook the young man’s hand.

“Come inside. You’ve arrived in time to meet the one you’re switching places with.” Unlocking the door with his thumb print he entered the old farm house. The young man followed close behind.

Turning on the lights he asked, “Are you hungry or thirsty Carmen?”

“Yes Sir! It’s been a long trip.”

Pointing towards the fridge he said, “That large white box is what humans used to call a refrigerator. There’s food and drinks inside.” He watched as the young man walked over to the fridge.

Josh wondered if he was going to be smart enough to know how to pull it open. He was.

“Wow! I’ve never seen so much food! Are those real eggs?”

“Yes they are. You can have some if you like.”

“How do I make them?”

“Here let me show you the quick and easy way.” Josh grabbed an egg and pulled a microwavable egg dish from the cabinet. He cracked the egg and dropped it into the dish and placed it in the microwave on medium for three minutes.

“What is this box you put the egg in Judicator?”

“This is a microwave oven. It’s something people used before your time. When that box beeps take out your food, but be careful because it will be hot. Wait one minute and your egg will be ready to eat.”

Carmen looked at the digital timer counting down. The machine made an awful buzzing noise.

He then slowly turned his head towards the Judicator. Despite the warnings about asking questions he was going to take the risk. “Judicator can I ask you a few questions?”

“Is this going to take long Carmen? I need to get you and your replacement working together as soon as possible.”

“Are you really over one hundred years old?”

“Actually I am one hundred and fifty six years old.”

“So the rumors are true?”

“Yes. The doctor and I discovered a way to slow the aging process. We are the only ones who know the secret and unless something drastically changes we will be the only ones who ever will.”

Josh turned to the bathroom and before he could open the door Carmen asked another question.

“Judicator is it true that you are my father?”

Josh stopped in his tracks. He didn’t think he would ever be asked this question.

It was his seed that was inseminated into the young man’s mother.

Carmen and Brent had to be linked genetically to him. Otherwise red flags would have popped up if anyone were to check blood work to see if he was the father.

He turned and looked at the young man. “In some sense of the word Carmen you are my son. You have my DNA.

In another sense I was never there to raise you or love you. In that sense your mother’s husband is more your father than I am.”

“Thanks Judicator. Those are the only questions I had.”

Josh turned back around and opened the bathroom door. Walking to the tub he pulled the latch. It slowly rose to set on its side. Inside the stairwell were Rasha, Brent, and another of his trusted leaders Alex.

“I’m sorry it’s so late. Did you at least get some rest?”

Rasha raised her eyebrow. “Have you ever tried to sleep on these stairs? Besides, after the news today any hope for sleep was highly unlikely. It wasn’t going to happen.”

Looking toward Alex he said, “Good to see that you’re back safe and sound. How was the mission?”

“The UWH has officially lost eight more greenhouses. Seems like a small price for them pay considering the lives they took and the loved ones we lost.”

Josh then looked at Brent who appeared overly nervous and afraid. “Come with me Brent.”

The young man looked at Rasha and Alex.

Rasha smiled. “It’s O.K. Brent. Judicator Joshua has something very important to tell you and something very important to ask of you.”

Grabbing a small sack of belongings Brent slowly moved from the steps into the bathroom.

Josh looking to Rasha and Alex said, “Are you two coming up?”

Rasha looked him in the eyes. “I think that initially you and Brent need some privacy. We’ll come out in a few minutes to begin the training.

I also wanted to remind you that the people are beginning to assemble in the sanctuary as you requested.”

Josh nodded. “Follow me Brent.” The sound of the microwave beeped as he turned to enter the kitchen. “Do me a favor and eat your egg here in the kitchen Carmen. I will call you if I need you.”

The young man didn’t appear to hear anything he had said. His attention was focused more on getting the hot egg out of the noisy cook box.

Brent followed Josh into the front room of the house. There were many things that looked very strange to him. He wasn’t sure what they all were, but somehow he felt it didn’t matter if he knew what they were anyway.

He was nervous. Fear of coming into the Judicator’s house had been instilled in him since he was a child.

Joshua pointed for Brent to sit in the chair that faced away from the door. It was strange for him to think that less than twenty four hours ago Doc had sat in the very same place.

He positioned himself on the love seat across from Brent. He had practiced for many years what he was going to say when this time came, but he was struggling to find a place to begin.

He had tried to be a father to his son the best he could without letting him know the truth.

The fact that Brent looked so much like his mother made it hard. Many times he had wanted to grab him and hug him and offer him comfort.

He looked at his son and dropped his eyes to the floor.

“Brent. I have something to tell you and I’m not sure how you are going to respond. I’m not even sure where to start.”

“I’m a little nervous Judicator. We were always told we can never come here. Have I done something wrong? ”

He watched as the boy trembled. It was obvious that he was uncomfortable. It was an apprehension that many of the youth shared when they were in his presence.

“No, you haven’t done anything wrong.” A moment of silence passed.

“Brent, years ago when the earth was searching for environmentally safe energy a Scientist name Julie Morgan advanced a theory.

She believed that much of our reality, or the world we experience and know is a four dimensional blanket, like a quilt of atomic fibers woven together with the threads of magnetism and gravity. Underneath those fibers she believed was an unquenchable energy source that not only produced, but held all things together.

She thought that if she could tear or punch a hole through these fibers that we could somehow tap into that energy; energy so powerful that it could easily supply the earth with a never diminishing power supply.

Julie believed this is why the universe had not unraveled over time as Physicists expected.

She thought two different types of energy existed. The energy sources we are aware of in our universe and the one unseen source holding all reality together.”

“Why are you telling me this Judicator? I’m not even sure that any of this makes sense to me. What does it have to do with me?”

“It has everything to do with you Brent, because Julie Morgan was your mother.” His words looked as if they hit the youngster like a brick.

“I thought my mother and father died defending the Underworlders!”

“Your mother did die for the Underworlders, but not in the way you have been told. She died to give the Underworlders a chance for life.”

Brent was confused. “What about my father?” Brent was in disbelief. He couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Why now? Why had all of this been kept from him?

Josh ignored Brent’s question and continued. “Eventually your mom was successful. She opened the fabric of our universe into an alternate dimension or state of existence, but she couldn’t keep it open.

The material of existence was more like a liquid than a fiber. It filled any opening made in it by the controlled atomic blasts she used to pry it open.

She came up with an idea. Her idea was to freeze or plug the opening with enough solid, but permeable and conductive matter, so we could use the energy. It was sort of like sticking your foot in a door to keep someone from shutting it on you.

It took eleven years, but she was successful. The technology used water and a lot of it. It literally shot water from Lake Erie into the tear while instantly freezing it at the same time.

The amount of energy to keep the rip open long enough to fill it with the dense ice block was enormous. Many of the Megapolis cities went without power for days as the experiments ran.

In the end we couldn’t keep the rip open, but something from the other side got through. We didn’t know what it was. It was like a small ball of radiating energy.

We soon found out we had created a serious problem. Once the ice began to melt and this source of energy began to release itself on this side of existence, then everything in our space and time began to melt. It began consuming our material world.

I literally watched everything around it catch fire and begin to liquefy. The earth, the sky, and the ground began to dissolve.

We believe that the very universe itself would have disappeared if we hadn't acted as quickly as we did.

We had to keep freezing this thing in order to keep our world and possibly the universe from being destroyed by its presence."

"What does this have to do with me Judicator?"

"Your mom and dad were both called to work the project. This small ball of energy is kept in what we call a stasis cell at the University in Megapolis Alpha.

There are machines and people working around the clock to keep this thing frozen.

If that process stops, then it is untelling what could happen. The UWH has been trying for the past forty years to tap into its power and provide the world with a never ending energy source.

Dr. Natas realized early on that if you controlled the universe's source of energy, then you could control the universe.

Josh happened to look behind him into the kitchen and saw Carmen at the table listening intently with his mouth ajar.

"Carmen you are not to repeat this to anyone. If you do I will have your tongue ripped out and your arms cut off so you can't even write about it.

And if I even think that you would use your feet to try and communicate what I am saying, then I'll cut them off too." He watched as Carmen gasped.

The young man rose from his seat. "Then I don't want to hear another word Judicator!" He ran into the bathroom and shut the door.

"What happened to my father Judicator?"

Josh dropped his head. Again he ignored Brent's question and continued. "You have a twin sister Brent. Her name is Becky. She works at the university. She is the head scientist

working on ways to harness the power from this source. Her genius is matched only by her mothers.”

Brent couldn't believe what he was hearing. Tears filled his eyes and flowed down his cheek. He was beginning to piece the story together. “Who's my father Judicator?”

Josh knew that Brent probably had unraveled the truth. Brent was just waiting for the fact to be revealed. The fact he already knew in his heart was true.

“I'm your father Brent?”

The young man wiped his face dry. “How did my mother die?”

“She died giving birth to you and your sister.”

“How's that possible? With the technology that UWH possesses how's that possible?”

“The farther she got along in the pregnancy the more her organs began to deteriorate. She barely lived long enough to birth you, but she knew why it was happening to her and so did I.”

Brent looked confused. “Why?”

“She was dying because you and your sister were genetically altered to be the keys to unlocking the Genesis Project.”

Brent's jaw dropped and he stared blankly as he tried to grasp everything he had been told.

“You and your sister are meant to be a conductor and housing for the energy source trapped in the stasis cell.

What you were genetically created to be is what killed your mother, but she knew your life would mean life for all people.

I kept your identity a secret not only from the UWH, but from the Underworld community.

We went through a time when traitors had infiltrated the Underworld. We had to move our home over and over again until we could weed out the betrayers.

Knowledge of our relationship had to be kept secret for your safety.”

“Why was I separated from my sister?”

“In case something happened to Becky, then we had you as a backup. Doc knew about Becky, but we kept you a secret.

Unfortunately, Becky concluded what her mother had missed in her calculations. She learned she couldn’t do this alone and it would take both of you.”

Brent looked at Josh. “Why now? Why couldn’t I know the truth until now?”

“You were too young and little children don’t keep secrets very well, but I loved you as much as I could without letting on. I protected you by keeping your identity a secret.”

“But why now?” Brent looked down at the floor. He felt no one deserved to be put in the situation he was now experiencing.

Rasha stepped into the room. “Now it’s time for the Underworlder’s last and greatest mission.

It’s time for you to give your life in the same way your mother gave up her life for you and for us all.”

Brent was afraid of what Rasha was saying. “Am I going to die Rasha?”

Josh answered. “We don’t know Brent. It’s possible, but we don’t think so. The truth is we just don’t know.”

Rasha looked at Joshua. “Are you going to show him the video now?”

Josh shook his head yes.

Brent watched as Joshua walked over to a large box with a glass screen and pushed a button. A strange sound emerged from it like that of crumbling paper and crashing waves.

As the screen brightened, what looked like thousands of white and black dots bouncing around appeared.

The Judicator then grabbed a small shiny disc shaped object and placed it into another small slim box on top of the first one. The picture on the larger box changed and a flat two dimensional picture of a woman appeared.

It didn't take him long to realize that this was his mother.

Her hair was brown and wavy like his except it was much longer. Her smile was bright and perfect and her eyes were a bright baby blue. She was rubbing her stomach.

She was pregnant, and her stomach seemed to be glowing with an eerie light. She spoke.

"Brent. If you are watching this, then Becky and you and hopefully your dad are alive and there is still hope for the world.

My son, inside you and Becky is the answer to the world's problems. It is the key to freedom for our people from the UWH. You and your sister are the key of freedom for the Underworlders to exist and be accepted as those worthy of life.

There is a great responsibility on both your shoulders and I'm sure that you are feeling it heavily right now.

Don't think yourself so different. Like all people you are still human, and like all people you are special.

You were created with a special purpose all your own. It's what you were made to do.

I will always love you. I will pray that wherever my soul's energy may end up in the universe that it will be able to strengthen you when you need it the most. I love you Brent. May the God of the Universe bless your path."

The video ended and Brent wiped the tears from his face. He didn't know what to say at this point.

He was confused, lost, and overwhelmed all at the same time. He felt tired. He wanted to rest. This was too much. He watched Joshua turn off the large box and everything became silent.

Alex entered the room with Carmen. “Brent. This is Carmen. You are taking his place in the Upperworld system.

We’re going to remove his identification implant and place it in you. You need to learn everything about his life and learn it well in case you are questioned.”

Alex looked back and forth at Carmen and Brent. “I’m a little concerned. They don’t even look alike.”

Brent looked towards the Judicator. “Should we look alike?”

“Carmen is your brother by a different mother Brent. This won’t be a problem Alex. There won’t be enough time for anyone to figure anything out.”

Something else dawned upon Brent. “Does this mean that I can walk in the daylight?”

Josh shook his head yes. “In three days you will move in with me in Megapolis Alpha. You will be introduced to Doctor Natas and he will tell you to accept him like a grandfather.

He will treat you like a grandson. From there we will get you into the University. I have a plan, but I am not one hundred percent sure if I am going to follow it, or use my back up plan at the moment.

Brent shook his head in fear. “I’m going to meet Dr. Natas? What do I say? How should I act? I don’t know if I can do this.”

Josh smiled. “Just be yourself Brent and whatever you do keep your story straight. You can do this.

You’ve been raised to believe it is right to give your life for the good of the all. I know you believe this to be true.”

Brent was trying to come to terms with everything as they stood watching him in silence. It was happening so fast. There was so much to process. Looking at Josh he asked, “Do I still call you Judicator?”

Rasha laughed. “At this point you can call him whatever you like.” Looking to Joshua she said, “There is one other matter he will need deal with.”

“What’s that?” Brent didn’t know if he could handle any more.

“You’re going to need a tan.”

Brent looked confused. “What’s a tan?”

Josh’s eyebrows rose. “You’re going to need to become dark skinned like me, but you may have to find out what it means to become red first.”

Brent nervously rose from his seat. “What happens when I get into the university?”

“Your sister will instruct you when the time is right. Right now we need to sit you and Carmen down at the table. You need to start making his memories your memories and his life your life.”

Rasha moved to touch Josh on the shoulder and get his attention. “Let Alex take care of this? It’s almost time for the sun to rise and you need to get below and meet with the community.”

Josh was thinking about what Rasha had just said when she spoke again.

“I’ll go make sure everyone is ready. Why don’t you take Brent outside and let him see his first sunrise. It will give you some time to answer any more questions he might have.”

Josh was tired and wasn’t thinking straight. Maybe Rasha was right.

“Come on Brent. Let’s go watch your first sunrise.” He walked over to the mantle and opened a small gold jewelry box that use to belong to Julie. Inside was a pair of her old sun glasses. He pulled them out and handed them to Brent.”

“What are these?”

“Use them. They were your mothers. It’s no telling how the sun’s rays will affect your eyes at first. I’ll get you some water to take with you. You may also need to lose your shirt. I guarantee you will have never felt anything as hot as this.”

Josh grabbed a jug of water from the fridge and added some ice cubes. He opened the door and led Brent out onto the porch where he had him remove his shirt. Next he placed the sunglasses on his head.

During this time Alex sat Carmen down at the kitchen table and began to tell him what his new life underground would be like.

Rasha headed down to the Sanctuary to prepare the people to meet with the Judicator.

Brent sat next to Josh on the top front porch step. He had never been outside.

He had been told about the wind and had seen many pictures in his textbooks of what the earth looked like before the devastation and what it looked like now, but nothing compared to seeing it for himself.

Even though he had been told it was now lifeless and drab and dreary, he couldn't help but see vibrant colors and life everywhere. It was so different compared to what he had known living underground.

He didn't say anything to Josh. It was all so overwhelming. He didn't want to know anything else. He didn't know if he could handle any more.

It was hard for him to believe that the man he admired and feared the most was his father. No one would believe it, and he didn't know if he would ever have the chance to tell them. He didn't know if he would ever see his friends and foster family again.

As the light began to get brighter over the horizon he could feel the warmth. It felt good to him.

There were many shades of color everywhere. He couldn't describe the awe he was feeling. He couldn't find words to describe the sights and sounds and smells. He couldn't believe he was sitting in the light of day.

Josh waited for the sun to show fully over the horizon. It quickly burned the mist of the night away.

“I think that’s enough for now. We don’t want to over expose you on the first day. Over the next few days we will let you get used to spending more and more time outside.”

When Josh stood to his feet Brent followed him into the house.

Alex and Carmen rose from their chairs when they saw Josh and Brent entering.

Josh spoke. “He’s all yours. You know what to do.”

Alex smiled at the youngster. “It’s time to learn about your new life above ground and the life you never lived.”

Josh left them at the table as he headed down the stairwell. The tub was still open.

He had dreaded this moment as well. Most of these people had lived in this cavern all their life. It has been the only home and world they have ever known.

Now it was time to move. Now it is time to move quickly for survival’s sake. Whether or not they would all survive depended upon Brent and Becky now.

All this would be for nothing if they fail. Life and the universe as they know it could disappear. It will all have been for nothing then.

It will have been a fleeting moment of existence that in the end meant zilch.

If there was ever a reason for him to consider believing in a God, then he had found one. If there was ever a reason to believe in something after this life, then he was staring it in the face.

Life and death, pain and love, experiences, gains and losses will all be for nothing if this is the end. If this is all there is in the end.

He reached the bottom landing and Rasha was waiting for Him.

“The Sanctuary is full. Everyone is assembled.”

“Rasha?”

“What is it Joshua?”

“I’m going to ask you to do something that I have never asked you to do before. Before I speak to the crowd will you offer a prayer to your God for us?”

The surprise Rasha felt was twisted with wonder and hope. “I would be glad to pray for us Joshua.”

They both walked into the large Sanctuary. The dim lights had been turned on high. The colors of the Sanctuary and wall murals came to life. They reflected life in the light. A life the Underworlders have never known.

The people were huddled together. There were thousands of them. All of the ramps that spiraled up the large cavern’s walls were filled.

Joshua walked with Rasha down a narrow isle that led up to the lectern. Behind it was a picture that Julie had painted. It was a replica of a picture she had hung on their wall at home.

He didn’t know who the man was, but there was something inviting about the way he held out his arms.

The light shining behind his head set him apart as someone different than everyone else.

Julie believed he was a savior. Like Becky and Brent she believed that this savior was a divine implant.

He never listened to the stories she had told of this man. It was all fantasy to him. Nice stories that made you feel good while you lived in hell. This was the only use he saw in them.

Now he wished he knew them. He would like to tell them to Becky and Brent. It was part of their mother’s life that made her so beautiful.

They walked up the three steps to the lectern and Josh noticed the quietness of the room. It was eerily still.

He looked towards Rasha and asked her to say a prayer.

Rasha prayed.

He wasn't sure about what she was saying and asking this God, but her words comforted and calmed him. She believed that this God was near and close by watching all things and ready to reveal his being to all who desire deep within to see.

He welcomed the calm. The last few days he had become a nervous wreck. She finished her prayer and the assembly all repeated her final word. "Amen." He didn't know what it meant, but he said it as well.

Looking out at them he saw mothers and fathers, soldiers and workers, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, parents and their children, and grandparents and their grandchildren. He saw the value of life.

With his voice echoing in the large cavern he said, "A person can never be prepared for what I am about to say. I have waited, anticipated and feared most of my lifetime to utter these words.

The time is now. It is the time for our freedom. It is the time for our right to live to be made known to the farthest reaches of the earth.

Eden awaits us. She has been waiting for us all of our lives. There we will have a feast for us there and we will run free and we will live and love and laugh.

Getting there is the hard part. Some of us will not make it to this place safely.

Some will fight and die along the way, but every life lost will be a life well spent.

It will be a life that every generation of our loved ones and friends will honor and they will raise praises concerning the sacrifices we have made.

Rise up Underworlders! Take all you will need for your Journey! A new world awaits and your Eden is ready for the taking!”

The assembly rose into cheers. They trusted him wholeheartedly. Josh knew their excitement and hope would carry them.

He was glad they had no idea of the chaos and uncertainty that lay ahead for them all.

CHAPTER 4

A CHANGE OF PLAN

Josh placed his palm against the door's security scanner. The light lit and the door slid open. Waiting for him inside his office next to his desk was his personal assistant Dalton.

"What's on the agenda for today Dalton?"

"You have a meeting with the General Council after lunch to discuss labor reorganization plans for Megapolis Alpha after the Underworlders are found and eradicated."

Josh sat in his seat and turned on his monitor and communication screen. "Don't you mean, if the Underworlders are found Dalton?"

The assistant smirked. "It sounds as if you don't believe that they are in our grasp. You were so certain a few days ago at the celebration."

"Dalton, I always strive for perfection, but prepare for the worst, as I hope for the best. We can never be certain about anything. It's a good life philosophy. I suggest you give it a try."

Dalton smiled. "Yes sir. I will try to remember and practice that."

"Is there any word on the search team's efforts? Why haven't I received the reports to be analyzed?"

Dalton handed him a location report from the field officer.

Josh looked it over. It couldn't be right. They were moving at an alarming rate. There was no way they were waiting for reports to be analyzed and returned before they moved to the next location.

He thought he could keep them from reaching the farmhouse at least for a week by delaying the reports, but at this rate they would be there in under a day.

Dalton smirked. "Is there something wrong sir?"

"I'm just wondering how the search team has been able to move at such a fast rate without me analyzing and approving the reports. Where are the reports?"

"Oh! Those. Yes. Dr. Natas gave me the authorization to analyze and approve the reports when you are away from the office.

He figured with your son arriving soon that this would take a lot of the work load and pressure off of you.

I've stayed up all night doing the reports and as soon as they came in I analyzed them and sent them back to the field commander as soon as possible."

Josh looked up and the smile on Dalton's face reminded him of a man who was having the last laugh.

Something was wrong. He knew it in his gut. It was time to change to plan B.

Dalton moved a step closer to him and bent down. "Last night you left your watch on your desk sir.

I picked it up and tried to get it to you before you left, but you had already departed the building and was out of sight. It began vibrating and scared me a little. I then noticed that the glass was cracked, so I sent it over to be repaired. I knew you wouldn't mind."

This was not good! How could he have left his watch on the desk?! He was so tired yesterday. He hadn't slept in two days. It didn't even dawn on him that it was missing off his wrist.

His watch was the main way he communicated with the Underworlders! If a repairman took it apart, then he would be able to recognize that it wasn't just a watch!

The technician might ask questions. His anger was boiling over now, but also his suspicions that something was askew.

He stood up from his desk chair in a rage and pulled out one of his weapons from his back. He stepped towards Dalton and placed the tip of the weapon next to his forehead.

Dalton was trying to smile, but fear was overcoming him. “This isn’t just over a watch is it Judicator?”

“The crack in my watch had sentimental value you little roach. A story I don’t have to share with you!

The next time you touch any of my things without my permission I will blow your head right off your neck and let the kids play kickball with it until your eyes pop out!”

His communicator screen beeped. He turned the monitor to face him. His little situation was soon face to face with Doc on the screen.

Doc smiled. “Am I interrupting something? Are you boys not playing nice with each other?”

Josh responded. “Boys will be boys Doc!” He pushed Dalton’s head away with his weapon. “Get out of here before I start to really play ruff with you.”

“Yes sir.”

Dalton ran from the office.

Doc laughed. “What was that all about?”

“The little worm’s been taking my things without my permission.”

“I take it that you mean your watch.”

Josh was startled. “Yeah! How did you know?”

“He couldn’t get a hold of you last night, so he called me and asked if I thought you would mind if he had it repaired. I told him it would be alright. I guess I was wrong!”

Josh felt in the pit of his stomach something was terribly troubling with this situation. “You almost got the little roach killed Doc.”

“He’ll be alright. He needs to learn to respect and fear his elder. By the way, I need you to take a trip for me.

It appears that Megapolis Theta is having some governance issues.

They need to have a little reminder concerning who’s in charge in this world. I’ve ordered a legion of troops around the city.

I think they’re ready to talk now.”

Josh didn’t want to deal with this now. He needed to stall until he could figure things out. “What about the Search? I want to be here. Can’t the matter wait?”

“Don’t worry we won’t go in after them without you. The worm can handle things while you’re out. It’s my decision Josh. I need you there immediately on this one.”

He knew saying anything further to Doc was pointless. If it had been anyone else he would have pushed the issue, but it was Doc. He didn’t change his mind once he put his foot down.

“Alright Doc, just let me swing by and get my watch first.”

The Doc smiled. “There won’t be time. I’ve sent a Helios to pick you up and drive you to the airport.

It’s waiting for you as we speak.

A list of my demands will be waiting for you on the plane. You might want to familiarize yourself with them.”

Josh couldn’t fight the growing fear that was overcoming him. What was going on? How was he going to contact Luke, Alex, or Rasha? Was he being set up?

Doc nodded his head and the screen went blank. He placed the weapon back into the nape of his back. All of this seemed like a trap was being laid.

Walking out of his office door he spotted the Helios waiting for him through the glass of the entranceway.

He was surprised by two guards that moved in on either side of him. They walked him to the door of the building, but didn't follow him out. This was definitely out of the ordinary.

He recognized the young guard standing at the passenger door of the vehicle as the Crawler Second Class from the other night.

Walking his way over to the young man he asked, "It's Crawler Benton isn't it?"

"Yes sir. I'm surprised you remembered my name sir."

"I take it that you will accompany me on my trip today."

"Yes sir. I have strict orders to drive you to the airport and once in Megapolis Theta inspect your vehicle for explosives. I am to then drive you to your destination, and return you to the plane safely for the return flight home."

"Did those strict orders include not letting me return to my house to change?"

"We are following Protocol Red sir. This means you are to have no communications with anyone at any time. Information may be leaked and compromise the nature of your trip.

It also means we are to not stop anywhere, not even your house for any reason, because time is of the essence."

Josh knew with certainty that something was wrong now. They had never used Protocol Red. They never had a reason. Protocol Red was for a doomsday emergency.

He had to communicate with Luke to get the people moving quicker. It seemed as if they were trying to get him out of the way for some reason.

Did Doc know his secret? Did they know about his watch? These were details he had to find out, but he needed to get in touch with Luke, but how?

There was one method he had never used. Let's hope it worked for him. He needed to somehow persuade Crawler Benton to deviate from the protocol.

“Crawler Benton, does this include not stopping to use the bathroom? If it does, then you may have a mess on your hands. I ate something last night that has seriously upset my stomach”

Benton made a noise. He knew what the Judicator was talking about. “I think it was the meat sir. I think it was a little rancid. I’m sure under the circumstances that we can make arrangements for a bathroom stop.”

Josh laughed inside. That was easy. This kid really didn’t know protocol. If he did, then he would know Doc could have him shot for this breach.

“Then lead on Crawler Benton to a toilet of your choosing.”

“Yes sir!”

Benton opened the door and let the Judicator into the back seat. Jumping into the driver seat he drove to a guardhouse with toilets near the airport.

He knew the protocol requirements, but figured a few minutes to use the restroom wouldn’t hurt.

After all it was the Judicator. He wrote the law and distributed justice. If the bathroom stop was alright with him, then it must be alright.

Josh jumped out of the Helios when it stopped and played up his need to use the bathroom by running into the guard house and into a stall.

He slid a pen out from an inside shirt pocket and small piece of paper along with a plastic bag. He always had a backup plan.

One of the ways that Underworlder spies communicated was through the sewer tunnels.

Men and woman were stationed to retrieve messages flushed down into the sewers and take them to Alex, Luke, or himself. Hopefully His message would be passed on before it was too late.

He knew with the search team moving as fast as they were, they could be at the farmhouse by the end of the day. He had to make this trip to Theta short and get back in time.

Sealing the message in the bag he flushed it making sure that it went down and stayed down.

For the sake of anyone listening he said, “Ahh! That’s better!”

Opening the door he noticed Crawler Benton had followed him inside.

“Use it if you need to Benton. It could be a heck of a trip and the plane doesn’t have a bathroom.”

The young man held his stomach. He took the Judicator’s advice and entered a stall. His bowels needed some relief as well.

Jasper saw the small bag floating on top of the quickly flowing stream of sewage. It passed him before he had the chance to grab hold.

Hopping up off the side of the cylindrical sewer wall where he had wedged himself to rest, he began sloshing through the muck to reach the bag in time.

If the message made it to the main drain before he could reach it, then it would be sent into the water treatment plant and become shredded, or even worse; found and read.

He almost had the bag in his grasp when he lost his footing in the muck. The fall caused him to land on his back side.

“Oh no!” He didn’t want to do it, but he had no choice. If he didn’t reach the message within the next few seconds, then it would be out of his ability to reach and become lost for sure.

He rolled over on his stomach and arched himself up on his hands and knees against the dry part of the tunnel wall like a frog.

With a push he went flying down the stream of raw waste.

The sound of the thousands of gallons of water running into the main drain from all the adjoining tunnels was almost deafening.

With the light from his helmet aimed at the message his body soon caught up to it and the message was in hand, but not before he realized he was moving too fast. The ground was too slippery to stop himself from lurching over the edge of the main drain.

He thought to himself, "This is it! I'm a dead man!" He would be drawn into the drain and spit out from the water station's pumps as a mangled mass of what once was Jasper the Underworlder messenger.

Utter fear paralyzed him as half of his body travelled over the drains ten foot clearance. As he closed his eyes in terror he was jerked to a sudden stop and found himself suspended in the air over the drain. What had happened?

The light from his helmet shined down the huge concrete pipe into its wide opening. He thanked God for his life!

"God didn't save you idiot! I did!"

Jasper felt himself being dragged back to safety. He was glad to see the drain's mouth move farther and farther away from him.

When he finally was able to stand on his feet he turned to see Commander Luke.

"Luke! Oh thank God."

"Like I said Jasper, God didn't save you I did."

"That's a matter of opinion Commander." It finally dawned on Jasper that the Commander was in the sewers. "It isn't that I

don't appreciate you being here, but can I ask what you are doing down here Commander?"

"You mean besides saving your neck? I was hoping that you received a message from the Judicator. We've been trying to reach him, but we haven't been able to make any contact with him since last night. We fear something may be wrong."

"Oh no! I hope he's alright. I have this message. It's the only thing I have seen in three weeks." He looked back to the drain opening. "It was almost my last message."

Luke grabbed the plastic bag and read the note inside. Some of the other messengers from some of the other tunnels had arrived on the scene.

Luke looked up at them. "Get everyone together and get cleaned up crew. Sewer duty is over. We're all evacuating to Eden immediately!"

Jasper asked, "Was it from the Judicator?"

"Yes." Patting Jasper on the shoulder he realized he had stuck his hand in more sewage muck.

Speaking slowly and in disgust he said, "Jasper if you hadn't grabbed this message, then all of us could have been dead within hours. Who would have ever thought you and I would become Underworld heroes standing in this mess."

Jasper chuckled and then looked at himself. He didn't look good. Lifting his head and gazing at the Commander he said, "I'm glad I lost my sense of smell Commander."

"I wish I had Jasper. I wish I had."

CHAPTER 5

IN THE LIGHT

“Ouch!” Brent yelled out as Rasha pushed against his arm to wake him.

“I’m sorry Brent. I forgot.”

“I can’t believe how much it still hurts.” It had been two days, but at least it didn’t hurt as bad as it did the first day.

“Brent we received word from Joshua that he’s on his way to pick you up.”

“What time is it?” Brent rubbed his eyes and noticed that it was dark outside.

“It’s a little after one in the morning.”

Focusing in on Rasha he asked, “Did something happen?”

“Besides the fact that the search team looking for us is advancing quickly and Josh thinks they could be in range to detect us within three to four hours. Nope; nothing’s wrong.”

Brent knew that Rasha was being sarcastic. “Everything is happening so fast Rasha. Just a few days ago I was a young kid learning how to survive, and today I’m expected to be the savior of my friends and family.”

He felt deep down he was going to fail. He didn’t know if he could do this. He was sure he would let everyone down.

Rasha extended her arm towards him. “Let me see your hand.”

Brent held out the hand that had received Carmen’s ID implant.

Looking over the area she asked, “Does it hurt?”

“A little bit.” He knew Rasha feared that an infection was starting.

“It’s just under the skin. I don’t understand why your system is reacting this way.” She reached in her medical kit and pulled out her ointment.

She still didn’t understand the technology behind the Nano-Cell Bots in the cream.

They used this ointment for everything. Ninety percent of the time whether you digested it or rubbed it on the wound the Nanos found and fixed the problem.

She rubbed it over the area of the implant.

Pulling her electronic bar scanner out of her sack she waved it over the implanted I.D. tag. The reader displayed a number of illegible characters.

“Either my scanner is broken, or your implant is defective. This is going to be a problem.”

Rasha’s watch began blinking with a red light. “That’s the backup warning system. There’s an intruder on the property!”

Brent could see the concern on her face. His heart began to race. “An intruder? Could it be the Judicator?”

“No! Joshua’s Helios automatically disables all of my alarms. My watch has sounded only three times in my life and all of them occurred this week. It happened once with Dr. Natas, once with Carmen, and right now.”

“What do we do Rasha?”

Rasha reached for her weapon and pulled it from her holster. “We sit, wait quietly, and respond only if necessary.”

A sound from the front door startled them. Someone was trying to enter the farm house.

The bedroom was located directly off the main living space and they heard an individual walking across the squeaky front porch to the window of the room where they were hiding.

Rasha raised her weapon and pointed it at the figure in the window. She could see a person’s outline through the shade. The person pushed up on the window only to find it locked.

Normally the main alarm positioned on the outskirts of the property would have given them five minutes to take action.

Something was wrong.

Brent whispered. "Should we go down the stairs?"

Rasha put her finger to her lips in a shushing gesture. Her watch stopped flashing. Joshua was near.

The intruder went around the house checking all the windows and doors. There was no way someone was getting into Joshua's house unless they crashed in through the wall.

All the doors and windows were impenetrable. What seemed like an eternity passed when she heard the front door unlock.

Josh yelled into the house. "Brent! Come here and help me."

Rasha barreled through the bedroom door before Brent had the opportunity to react.

Brent jumped from the bed and rushed into the living room to see Rasha and Josh dragging a body across the floor.

Josh yelled. "Get the door Brent!"

Brent ran to door and closed it shut. When he turned around they already had the unconscious young man propped in one of the kitchen chairs.

Joshua reached under the sink and grabbed a wad of old clothesline. He and Rasha quickly had his arms and legs secured.

Brent asked, "How did you know we had an intruder Josh?"

Josh lifted up his arm and pointed at his watch which was still vibrating. "I know everything that's happening around my house. It may not blink a pretty red like Rasha's, but it will vibrate you out of a dead sleep." He kissed his watch. "I sure did miss you little friend."

Josh pressed the button on its side to reset the alarm. He waited a few moments staring at the watch face to see if there

were more intruders. “He seems to be the only one out there. Let’s wake him up Rasha.”

Rasha went back into the front bedroom and grabbed a small vial from her medical kit.

Entering back into the kitchen she broke the small glass container and placed it under the young man’s nose. His eyes opened and he shook his head.

“What happened? Where am I?” the young man said in a slew of confusion.

Josh waved for Rasha to disappear into the bathroom. Brent’s presence didn’t matter, because he was making his debut soon anyway.

Getting into the young man’s line of sight he asked, “Who are you and what were you doing trying to break into the Judicator’s house?”

The young man look relieved. “Judicator I have a message for you.”

Josh was puzzled. “A message? What message?”

“The replacement was intercepted!” The young man looked more confused once he realized his predicament. “Why am I tied up?”

Josh was taken back. “Replacement intercepted! What are you talking about?!”

The young man was startled by Joshua’s anger. “He was found dead and was brought back to our house yesterday, so they sent me to inform you.”

“Who are you?” Brent asked.

The young man began to tear up. “I’m Carmen’s brother Sam.”

Rasha appeared through the bathroom doorway. “What’s going on here Josh?”

He grabbed the young man by his shirt. “You better not be lying to me.”

“Just look in my pocket. There is a picture of me and Carmen with our parents.”

Josh didn't have to look. He knew it was the truth.

He pulled a chair out and sat. Dropping his head into his hands he thought if this is all true, then everything has been compromised just as he believed.

If the real Carmen is dead, then who is this other Carmen? His heart began to race as he realized the implications.

He's a plant! This means that the UWH must know the location of the Underworlders! This means that Doc already knows that he is involved! But how much do they know? His mind went to Becky!

Rasha looked worried. “This might explain why the alarm didn't alert me until Sam was on the porch.

Is it possible that our new friend somehow disarmed the main alarm system?”

Josh nodded yes. “Good thing he didn't know about my automatic backup emergency system. It may not have the range of the first system, but it obviously works.”

Rasha nodded. “Good thing you always have a backup plan.”

Brent screamed in pain. “It really hurts!”

Josh grabbed Brent's arm. “Let me see!” The first thing that came to his mind was that the chip was poisoning him somehow. “Cut this thing out of him Rasha!”

Rasha pulled a blade from a sheath on her side as Josh held Brent's hand securely on the table.

With a swift slice she opened the skin and picked the chip out. Brent screamed in pain.

Josh held out one of his fingers. “Cut me!”

Rasha was surprised by the request.

“Cut me Rasha! Hurry!”

She sliced the tip of the finger he held out to her. She watched as he dropped his blood into the wound on Brent's hand. Her eyes couldn't believe it!

Within seconds the slice healed over. Brent's sunburn also began to slowly disappear up his arm.

Rasha couldn't believe her eyes. "Tell me what just happened, Josh?"

"I may have just saved one of our keys." Josh showed her the cut on his finger. It had healed as well.

She was stunned. "How?"

"Let's just say that the little concoction that keeps the Doc and I young does a little more than what we have shared with the world?"

While the world uses the Nano-Cell Bots for healing, we use Bio-reproducing Nano-Cell Bots to stay young and healthy."

Rasha shook her head in disbelief.

"Where's the false Carmen Rasha?" Josh asked with worry in his voice.

"He's with Luke and Alex!" Everything was beginning to make sense in my mind now. "There is no doubt in my mind that he's a spy. He's been asking a lot of questions and disappearing."

The seriousness of the situation dawned on her. She went to instant tears. "No!"

"Get to Luke and Alex now and inform them. Tell them to not let the kid out of their sight.

They know what they'll need to do. I don't know what information he has been able to send, but make sure he doesn't have the opportunity to get near the surface to send anything else.

I hope they haven't mentioned anything about the location of Eden. Keep sending our people there as fast as possible.

The UWH obviously knows we're here. I thought they were moving way too fast. Now I know why." Josh turned to the young man to cut him free from the rope.

"Well Sam, I believe in back up plans and believe it or not you were sent for a reason. It wasn't just to inform me. You are your brother's replacement."

"I'm what?"

"Yes. It means you have my DNA and we need your chip."

Rasha held Sam's hand as Josh sliced the chip free. He placed it into a new slice made in Brent's hand and watched as it healed over within seconds.

"Rasha, make the call for the all of the Underworld to go to their Edens."

Rasha asked Sam to follow her and quickly left to carry out Josh's orders. She was going to call for a worldwide evacuation of all Underworld cities.

Brent standing near Josh asked him, "What are we going to do now Judicator?"

"There's no telling what Doc and the UWH know now. It's time for you and I to go to plan B."

Brent followed Joshua out through the front door to a large dilapidated building towards the back of the house.

"Are we going in there?"

Josh nodded. "This building is what was once known as a barn. Don't worry. Things are not as they seem and it's a lot stronger than it looks."

Josh pressed a knot in the wood and a small dish ejected. Taking the dish he spit on it and pushed it back into place.

Brent asked, "What are you doing?"

"I'm unlocking the doors. It's a DNA lock."

A few seconds later the door slid open and he entered. Brent followed him inside. Once inside he walked over to the wall and

hit the power button. The generator started, the lights came on, and the door closed.

Brent was amazed. The outside of this building was obviously a cover. Inside was a fortified steel bunker. Computers booted up and electronic equipment and sensors began sounding and blinking.

“What is this place?”

“This is my extra set of eyes and ears. I can communicate and spy on any area of the world from here. I can also tap into every Megapolis’ computer network. Do me a favor and place your hand with the ID chip under that object.”

Brent placed his it under the flat panel and a line of light rolled up, then down his hand.

Josh began entering data and changed the identification picture of Sam to a picture of Brent.

“When the governments collapsed over a hundred years ago the world as everyone knew it ended. Not everyone kept track of the world up there.”

“The world up there?”

“Space. In space were thousands of government and commercial satellites that were left orbiting the earth.

Let’s just say that as an insider I was able to hide a few for myself.”

Josh connected the computer to the satellite and scanned the area outside of Megapolis Alpha. He then zoned in on the search crew nearing his farm house.”

Brent squinted at the screen. “Are they the ones coming for us?”

Josh nodded. “They’re just slowly making their way here to us. They’re not even searching with the equipment. It’s because they don’t need to. They know where they’re going.”

“What are we going to do now Judicator?”

“Plan B. We drop in from the sky.”

Brent looked confused. "Drop in from the sky?"

"Yes Brent. The human race hasn't forgotten how to fly. We may have regressed back a bit in some areas, but not that far."

"How are we going to do this?"

"None of the Megapolis cities have air defenses. There's no need. Doc has control over all working airstrips and aircraft. So we are going to float up and then glide in."

"How are we going to do that?"

"We are going to use two old and long forgotten inventions. They are known as a hot air balloon, and a hang glider. In fact the balloon is filling up as we speak."

"Where?"

Josh pointed up towards the roof of the barn. Brent's eyes followed the direction of his finger. All Brent could see was netting that spanned the entire ceiling. It was blanketed by a dark colored material. He assumed it was the balloon.

"Of course my balloon has had some modifications. I modified its shape to mimic that of the barn roof.

I also redesigned the barn roof to retract into the walls. That wasn't so easy. I had to do much of the work myself.

We will float straight up and from there we disconnect and glide in. It's time to get suited up."

Josh walked over to a set of stairs near the entrance of the barn. The stairs climbed up through the only place where the netting wasn't attached.

Brent followed him to a metal platform at the top. He was able to get a top side view of the balloon as it filled.

On the platform was a large machine with bird like wings. It rested on metal supports. A human harness was attached to it underneath and a large rope connected the top of the craft to the balloon.

The only other thing on the landing was a black metal chest.

Josh opened the chest and took out two black jump suits, two pair of black shoes, and two masks. “Put on these shoes and jumpsuit. This little thing is what is called a ski mask. It goes over your head.”

Josh quickly changed, put on his shoes and pulled the ski mask over his head.

“How does this mask thing work?”

Turning around to look at Brent he snickered. He had the mask on backward. Walking over he shifted the mask around his head so he could see.

Brent muttered, “Oh.”

Josh repeated him. “Oh.”

He turned to face the glider and positioned himself underneath the harness. Calling Brent close to himself he connected them to one another and then harnessed himself to the glider.

“What do we do now Judicator?”

“We wait.”

Brent was beginning to shake and feel queasy. “I’m scared Josh.”

“It’s alright son. I always have a plan and a backup plan.”

When Josh called him son it was strange. He found it hard to accept that his father was alive, and that his father was Judicator Joshua.

A question inside of him was nagging to be asked. “Judicator what happens when the backup plan fails?”

“Then there is always the backup plan to the backup plan.”

“And if that fails.”

“I don’t know. I’ve never had the need to plan that far ahead. I suppose when that happens we’ll have to resort to prayer.”

“Rasha and many of my friends pray. I never believed in a good God, because of what happened to my parents. I figured if

there was a good God, then he would have never let all of these bad things happen in our world. I don't know what prayer is, or even how it works?"

Josh hesitated. "It's something your mother used to do. If I ever get the time, then I'll explain it to you."

"Since I don't know how to pray, if the backup plan to the backup plan fails, then can you pray for the both of us?"

"Let's just hope that won't be necessary Brent."

The Balloon filled within twenty minutes and had expanded to the point where it rose and began pushing against the roof of the barn.

When it rose off the netting the balloon jerked them and pulled the glider off of its supports. Brent found himself flat on the platform with Josh on his back.

Josh lifted himself up and helped Brent to his feet.

"No turning back now. Hold on Brent." Josh held up the glider and instructed Brent to walk with him to the center of the netting.

Brent found it difficult to keep his balance, but he made it to the center without falling. Josh pressed the roof switch on his watch and the motors began turning the gears.

The roof slowly retracted. Josh struggled in the netting to keep Brent up and keep the glider upright, so that it didn't get caught and hung up.

Brent was petrified. He had never been off the ground. Heck! He had hardly walked on top of it.

As his feet began to leave the netting he was struck with fear. He closed his eyes tight. He felt for sure that he was about to die. He began to seriously doubt he could do this.

Quickly they began rising higher and higher. Josh said something that paralyzed him even more.

"It's time for your first flying lesson."

Brent felt the warm wind hitting his face and the flowing air overwhelmed him.

In an act of bravery he opened his eyes to see the faint lights of the Megapolis and the barn rapidly growing smaller. It was truly a spectacular sight. He resisted the temptation to close his eyes.

Brent didn't know if he was every going to see anything like this again, so pulling himself together he forced himself to experience the moment. It was absolutely terrifying, exhilarating and breathtaking.

Josh checked the altimeter on his watch and detached the glider when he felt they had reached an adequate height. The balloon disconnected with the pull of a cord and they began to soar.

When the glider detached from the balloon Brent thought he would lose the content of his stomach. His adrenaline was pumping full steam ahead.

Josh maneuvered the glider to approach the city from the rear. His goal was the large flat top roof of the University. Their success depended ultimately on his piloting abilities and the cross winds.

Earlier he had messaged Becky from the Helios to leave the roof door unlocked for them.

He hoped that Doc knew nothing of her involvement. Only a select few knew of her participation, so he felt she would be safe.

There was one last element to this plan. He had to distract any guards along the wall. A diversion had been calculated into plan B.

When the balloon released from the barn it had triggered a timed detonation device. He waited patiently for what was coming next.

Brent was in awe as Joshua maneuvered the glider towards the rear of the city. Suddenly a loud noise and a bright flash sent him flailing. “What was that?”

“That was an explosion.”

He had never heard an explosion, nor had he ever seen one. He could see small specks moving along the towering walls of the city in the direction of the spectacle. All attention seemed to be focused there.

Josh seeing the opportunity used his skill as an expert flyer to aim toward the edge of the university roof. “Hold on Brent. This could get a little rough.”

His worst fear came true when a down draft caught them and sent them slamming into the roof and into a slide.

He tried to do everything he could to stop, but he couldn't get enough traction. The momentum was too great.

The inevitable happened. He and Brent were hurled into the extruding elevator shaft on the roof. Josh braced himself as they hit the wall.

He was dizzy from the crash, but he knew that Brent took the majority of the impact. The boy's body was limp beneath him.

He unbuckled himself from the glider and disconnected his line to Brent. He needed to get the glider collapsed and secured before someone noticed it in the roof.

With a few clicks and folds the frame of the glider, as bent and damaged as it was from the collision, was compacted and out of sight.

He could hear Brent take in a deep breath. He was alright. The wind must have been knocked out of him.

Turning Brent over and pulling off the lad's mask he asked, “Are you alright?” He noticed a small gash on his brow. It had already begun healing itself.

Brent finally answered. “I think so.”

“We need to get inside.” He helped Brent to his feet and the two scuttled across the roof to the door he had instructed Becky to unlock. He didn’t know if she would be waiting there for them.

Reaching the door he gave the handle a twist and it opened. Becky had gotten his message. This was another sign for him that she was still safe. Once inside they travelled down a flight of stairs to a landing.

Josh removed his own ski mask and focused Brent’s attention. “Look at me son.”

“I’m looking.”

“We’re going to enter this door and turn right. We’re going down the hallway about ten feet. There is a door there. Back at the barn I entered your ID number into the system as a maintenance worker.

You will need to let the scanner scan your hand. I figured if Doc saw my ID log in, then it will only be a matter of time until the guards were upon us. So we’ll use yours.

Once inside the room we will unscrew a vent cover behind a desk in the right corner of the room. There is a rope ladder already inside the ventilation shaft.

We will climb down to the vent that connects to the stasis room. The ventilation shaft doesn’t have security sensors. I erased this vent from the building plans before the security system was installed. I’ll kick it out and crawl into the Stasis room. You follow me inside.

Here’s the plan. Becky is going to approach the opposite side of stasis cell from us. You won’t be able to see her. There are two nodes or ball like spheres on poles extending out of the cell on her side and two on the opposite side. This is your side.

She will place her hands on the set closest to her. You will place your hands on the opposite side. I’m going to tell you now. Your hands will instantly freeze to the nodes.”

Frightened he asked, "What happens then?"

"I don't know Son. What your mother and sister have calculated is something like a transfer. Your mother believed this was the only way.

She believed that both of you would become the key that would bring this dead world back to life.

She saw you as the hope for the future. I never knew her to be more certain about anything, so I trust her."

Brent nodded. "Then I will trust her too. Let's go."

Josh withdrew a weapon from the small of his back. He flung the door open and Brent followed him.

The hallway was dark and empty. They reached the door and Brent placed his hand under the scanner. A light scanned his hand and the door unlocked. They rushed in closing the door behind them.

Josh returned his weapon to the nape of his back. Running to the desk he flung it to the side.

Taped on the back side was a battery operated screwdriver. He ripped it off the desk and quickly zipped the four screws out of the frame dropping the vent to the ground.

He entered the shaft first. Climbing down onto the rope ladder he called Brent to follow behind him. Climbing down one level to the next vent he kicked it out.

Brent could hear it slam to the floor. He watched Josh crawl into the space beyond the vent opening and he followed him.

Josh stood up and saw his daughter. "Becky! Go honey, go!"

Brent caught a glimpse of a young woman darting behind what had to be the stasis cell. The first thing he noticed was that the room was intensely cold and the stasis cell was a huge block of steaming ice.

Deep within its center a light dimly glowed.

Josh pulled Brent off his knees and to his feet. He literally dragged him in the direction of the cell.

Brent couldn't believe how cold it was in the room. A liquid was pouring from pipes directly onto the cell leaving sheets of ice. At the foot of the cell a clear liquid that looked like water flowed into drains.

It seemed as if it was melting and freezing all at the same time.

Josh yelled. "Snap out of it Brent! Get your hands on the cell nodes!"

Brent didn't have time to think about what Josh had asked. Joshua pushed him towards the cell and he stumbled forward. His hands grabbed the nodes as his knees hit the ground.

The side of his face hit the stasis cell at the same time. He could feel his hands and his face freezing. There was an instant pain that quickly subsided.

He yelled out. "Dad!"

Josh yelled back, "Son!"

The doors to the left of him crashed open drawing his attention. The guards rushed in and took firing positions. Doc and Dalton calmly entered in after them.

Doc came in clapping his hands.

"Hello Joshua. Well done my boy! Well done! You are truly the hero of the day."

"Hello Doc."

Dalton stepped forward. "Judicator Joshua you are under arrest. You are charged with treason against the UWH."

Josh turned around to look at the stasis cell. Brent had disappeared. He quickly walked to the other side to look for Becky and heard the guards cocking their weapons. His heart was pounding. Becky was gone too.

The light from the energy source inside the cell had disappeared.

CHAPTER 6

I AM WHAT I AM

He supposed if he was a girl, then she is what he would look like.

“Brent?”

“Becky?”

Becky tried to run and hug him, but she soon realized she was floating and couldn't move. “Well, as far as I know we didn't explode, or cause the collapse of all matter in the universe.”

“Where are we Becky?”

Looking around she didn't have a clue. All around them was nothing, but a bluish hue. There were no objects. There was nothing, but the strange bluish light.

She stretched out her arms and legs trying to touch something. Trying an experiment she thought and willed herself next to Brent. It worked!

“I don't know where we are. I suppose it's possible that we are inside of the stasis cell, but I'm not sure. We may be inside the energy source.”

A voice boomed around them. “You are in Me and I Am in you.”

Brent responded. “Who are you?”

“I Am what I Am.”

Becky asked, “Are you the energy source within the stasis cell?”

The voice spoke. “I've been waiting for you my children.”

Brent looked at Becky confused and scared. “How is it that you have been waiting for us?”

“Before you were born I knew you. Before you were born I planned the number of your days and the purpose of your lives.”

Becky spoke in a raspy voice. “How is that possible?”

Brent asked, “Why have you been waiting for us?”

“So that I can be in you, and you in Me, and We can be together forever.”

The Centurion Captain yelled at him. “Judicator Joshua, face me; let me see your hands, and step towards me please.”

Josh turned and faced Doc as two guards rushed towards him. He noticed that one of the guards approaching him was Crawler Second Class Benton.

Crawler Benton patted him down. He grabbed one of the guns behind Josh’s back and handed it to the other guard.

Josh felt Benton touch the second weapon at the nape of his back, but he didn’t remove it. He left it!

Benton reported. “Judicator Joshua has no further weapons Captain.”

Doc stepped forward. “I thought you carried two weapons Josh. Maybe you should search him again Crawler.”

Josh responded quickly. “It came loose and fell down the ventilation shaft.”

With those words Doc walked forward a few more steps hitting the emergency shutdown button on a nearby wall. The freezing liquid from the tubes stopped flowing over the stasis cell.

Josh yelled, “What are you doing Doc?”

“This is part of the plan isn’t it? Turn off the flow is what Julie and Becky directed. I knew this day would come, but I really did hope it wouldn’t be like this Joshua.”

“What are you talking about Doc?”

“When Julie first came to me and told me how you were hiding the Underworlders and what you two had plotted concerning the stasis cell I couldn’t believe it!”

Josh didn’t believe what he was hearing. “Julie told you! You’re lying!”

Doc waved everyone out of the room. “Go! Leave us!”

Dalton approached Doc. “Are you sure that’s wise Sir?”

Doc looked at him with disdain. “Get out of my sight you little roach before I step on you.”

Josh laughed inside. Dalton looked as if his whole world had been crushed. Maybe his dreams of being the number two in command of the UWH had just been shattered.

Doc waited for the door to close and walked over to Josh. He placed his hand on Josh’s shoulders and led him over to one of Becky’s work tables. He sat on one of the stools and pulled a second one out for Joshua.

“Have a seat Josh and let me explain.”

Joshua stood there for a moment. Why was Doc saying these things? Did Julie really betray him? Where were Becky and Brent? Why hadn’t anything happened yet?

He needed to sit down. He felt faint. Had all of his control only been an illusion? Had he been the one being fooled all along?

“I know everything Josh. I have known since the beginning.”

“How? If you knew, then why didn’t you do something, or say something? Why didn’t you try to stop me?”

“Do you know why so many dictatorships failed in the world’s history?”

“What does this have to do with anything Doc?”

“Humor me for a minute. It will answer your question. Do you know why?”

“No I don’t, but I take it you’re going to tell me.”

“It’s because they failed to correctly manipulate the fears, hopes and dreams, drives and desires of the people they ruled over and at the same time keep control of their own.

This is what makes me a good dictator. I know how to manipulate these things to my own ends and at the same time control my own wants and desires, hopes and dreams.

Every year I focus the people of the world on their own survival. I center them on the common fear of our deteriorating conditions on earth. I have given them a common enemy in the Underworlders.

I have focused them on saving themselves. They are my puppets and they adore me for what I have done for them, but they adore you more Joshua.”

“I don’t care about their adoration.”

“I know. That’s what made you the ideal second in command. No dreams for exaltation, or leadership.

Though you disagreed with me, you couldn’t kill me and didn’t want to replace me. The only desire you had was to see everyone live in peace.

It’s why I trust you more than anyone in this world. It’s why Julie loved you so much.”

“Please tell me that Julie didn’t betray me. Please tell me what happened to Becky and Brent.”

“Julie would never betray you Josh. She only wanted to help you. She wanted what you wanted; peace. She came to me in confidence hoping to put an end to all the killing and violence.

She wanted to see the invisible wall between you and me torn down and both of us working together for the good of all humanity. She wanted to see Upperworlders and Underworlders living peacefully together.

As far as Becky and Brent are concerned I don’t know for sure, but Julie said this would happen and Becky’s calculations affirmed her mother’s predictions.”

“Are you telling me that Becky was in on this too?”

“Of course she was. She was just like her mother. The same love and concern for you that Julie had and the same trusting nature that found it so easy to confide in old Doc. But they don’t really know me like you do Josh. Do they?”

“Why did you wait so long? Why didn’t you do something about me and about the Underworlders a long time ago?”

“I told you Josh. The people needed a common fear. They needed an outlet for all their hopes and dreams. They needed a common goal and leadership they could trust. They don’t trust me, but they trust you. I trust you. This is why I needed you Josh.

Besides you did something after Julie died that made me wait.”

“What’s that?”

“You hid Brent! That was never part of the original plan. It wasn’t like you to change your plans in mid stream, but you did.

I knew there was nothing I could do to make you tell me the truth concerning his whereabouts.

With Brent out there somewhere it was too risky to attempt anything. So I waited patiently for the plan to come to fruition, but also in hopes that you would change your mind. My hope even now is that you come to terms with me and the situation.”

Doc smiled, “Having a limitless energy source was worth the wait, especially since it will secure my place as ruler of this world and any other world I want to conquer.”

Josh couldn’t believe that Julie went behind his back and betrayed him. He couldn’t believe that she told Doc about Brent. He couldn’t believe that Becky was a part of this too.

What was Julie doing?

To think Doc knew about the plan all along made him feel so hurt and betrayed. He was so confused right now he didn’t know what was real anymore. He wondered what was next.

“What happens now Doc? What are you going to do with Becky and Brent?”

“I suppose I’ll know for sure when I learn what has happened to them.”

Doc stood up from his stool. “But, I can tell you what’s happening at your farm house. As we speak Joshua the UWH forces are securing the area and searching for the entrance to the underground city.

It’s just a matter of time before we find them. It’s just a matter of time until we gain all the information we need to find every Underworlder city on earth.”

Doc put his hand on Josh’s shoulder. “Forget them Josh. You and I have a special gift. We know what we have created ourselves to be. All of them will eventually die anyway.

Only you and I have tasted of the medicine that will cause us to live forever. Let’s put aside these silly ideologies and our differences. Let’s live as gods and rule over these humans.

Let’s give the people a new vision and move out into space and reach into its depths. Once we figure out how to harness the energy we can conquer everything in our path. It will be you and I and the universe before us. What do you say?”

Josh shook his head. “I’m not like you Doc. I have no desire to rule over a dead world. I have no desire to rule over any world, or person, or being. It’s not my place or right.

Doc laughed. “The right is ours Joshua, because we have the power to force our right over others. It is survival of the fittest! It’s the obvious law of the Universe!”

Josh shook his head. “I know what I am and what I have become, but I’m not going to use it to force my rule over anyone.

People are not things to be used, or puppets to be manipulated for my or your pleasure, they are living beings that

are worthy to be cared for and loved. They should have the right to choose who will lead them and how they will live.

This world is not ours to conquer and command. It is ours to take care of, because out of it comes the sustenance we need to live. It is bigger than you and I. Sorry Doc. I will never fit into your plans.”

Rob looked disappointed. “I’m going to offer you one more chance Joshua. Forget about your silly ideologies. Look at it for what it is and the Underworlders for what they are; everything is temporary and they are mortal.

Trust me. All of this can be water under the bridge. I will forgive you. Call it growing pains. We can move forward into the expanse of the Universe forever. What do you say?”

What Doc didn’t know was that they were no longer the only immortals on the planet.

Becky and Brent both had come into contact with the life that flowed in his blood. They had both become partakers of the divine nature.

There was no way he would accept Doc’s offer, but he didn’t doubt for one second that Doc knew of a way to dispose of him if he needed. What has once been changed in the realm of humans can be changed again.

He knew he had to stall to see what happened to Becky and Brent. They were the key to everything

Doc put up his hands as if he was calling a halt to everything. “I’ll give you all the time you need to think about this. It will be a grand new adventure my boy! A grand new adventure! Then if we get bored of it, we can invent another undertaking in some other galaxy! The Universe will be our playground for eternity!”

Doc grabbed Josh and hugged him. He could never stay angry at his son. Joshua didn’t know it, but he was his reason for living. He would have given him the world to make him

happy. “I love you Josh. I’m willing to wait for you to come around.”

Josh heard a cracking sound. “What’s that?” He and Doc both looked towards the stasis cell. The ice was cracking down the middle.

“I believe it’s happening Joshua?”

“We should probably stand back.” They both ran to the farthest wall away from the stasis cell.

Josh turned over a stainless steel table and they hid behind it as a shield. A few more cracks were heard and the entire cylinder exploded. Shards of ice flew everywhere. One large fragment pierced through the table right between them.

Warning sirens connected to the cell structure began to blare. This would send the entire population running for cover.

“You alright Doc?”

“A little shaken up and few cuts, but they’ll heal soon enough.”

Doc looked over the table. There was a bluish mist that filled the room. He then saw a lone figure approaching them. “Who’s there? Becky? Brent is that you?”

Joshua heard the voice answer, but couldn’t tell whether it was a man or a woman. In fact it sounded as if a multitude of voices were speaking.

Doc looked at him. “Did it say what I think it said?”

Josh looked at Doc. I think it said, “We are One.” Josh looking over the table stared at the figure slowly making its way closer to them.

He pulled the hidden weapon from the small of his back.

The figure was nude, but had no genitalia. It had no distinct human features like ears, eyes, nose or mouth, but it was human shaped. It had a strange beauty that was indescribable. It had a magnificence that was all its own.

Julie had believed in angels. If there ever was an angel, then this is what it must look like.

Doc stuttered. "What are you?"

The figure didn't respond.

Doc tried again. "What are you?"

The creature spoke. "I AM what I AM."

Doc asked, "What do you want?"

"I've come to take possession of My world and My people."

Doc laughed. "I don't think so. This is my world! Guards!"

The guards rushed in through the door and began firing at the creature. Doc stood up and ran as they drew the creature's attention away from him.

Making his way behind the guards he exited the room and bumped into Dalton. "Run if you value your life worm!" He ran passed him and down the stairwell.

He heard Dalton scrambling to follow. Pulling his communicator out of his pocket he called to the landing strip. "Prepare my plane. We're leaving now. I'm on my way."

The creature had turned to face its attackers. It spoke one word. "Stop."

All of the men fell instantly to the ground. Joseph watched as the creature returned its gaze towards him.

Josh looking to the creature asked, "Are you going to kill me?"

"We have not come to kill you Joshua. We have come to love you. We have come to save you.

In thirty days We will take back what belongs to Us. In thirty days those who reject Us will have their desire fulfilled. They will never know Our peace. They will never know true life."

Josh was confused. "I don't understand."

“You will be Our instrument. Follow Us to the Valley of Blood and the Tree of Atonement. We will be lifted up in thirty days for the world to gaze upon Us and believe.

You will announce the good news. There will finally be peace on earth and in human souls. We will make all things new. We will cause all those who turn to Us to live together in harmony and peace for eternity.”

Joshua watched as the creature held out its hand towards him.

“Come and let us become One.”

Joshua didn't know what was happening, but he knew this was right. He rose up from behind the table. Walking, he placed his hand into the creature's and everything went blank.

When he opened his eyes he was alone. The creature had vanished. The room was empty. The guards that had fallen to the floor were no longer there.

He stood slowly to his feet. An unusual feeling overwhelmed him. He hadn't felt like this in a long time.

He was happy.

There was a powerful peace and contentment that he had never known flowing through him.

It was as if he was full of life. He felt like a kid. He felt free.

Inside was an urge to move and move quickly. It was a desire to accomplish all that the creature had requested of him.

Where was he going to start? What was he supposed to do? Looking to the floor he noticed that everywhere the creature had stepped sparkled and shined.

How would he tell the people of the world what the creature said?

His thought then went out to the Underworlders. He had to reach them. He had to save them. Then he would follow the creature.

On the other hand, the UWH now had another problem to handle. Doc may have recalled his forces to deal with this new threat. If this creature is as strong as he believed it to be, then the UWH had its hands full and the Underworlders would be second on Doc's mind.

His thoughts turned to Becky and Brent, but somehow he knew they were fine. They were a part of this somehow. They were with him even now. He even felt Julie near. Tears formed in his eyes. He didn't feel alone anymore.

He calmly walked to the door of the room. The creature's tracks led the same way and down the steps.

He walked to the buildings center stairwell and made his way down to the main floor. The creature's footsteps were clearly seen sparkling and clean wherever its feet had touched.

In the lobby he could see through the clear glass doors. Chaos had erupted in the streets.

People were fighting, running, screaming and crying. He walked to the doors and opened them. Walking outside he noticed that every place the creature had stepped had sprouted grass. He hadn't seen grass in a century. A citizen caught sight of him and began yelling to the tumultuous crowd.

"It's the Judicator! It's Joshua. He's here!"

The word spread and within minutes a crowd had gathered in front of the University and was growing larger by the second. The chaos seemed to settle down. Josh didn't move. He just stood there.

Eventually everyone became silent and waited for him to say something.

Looking he noticed Crawler Second Class Benton making his way through the crowd.

"Sir, what was that thing?"

"It said its name was I AM what I AM."

"What is it? What does that mean? What does it want?"

“I really don’t know what it is, or what that means Benton, but I do know what it wants.” His attention was drawn to a few people in the crowd who began yelling, “Tell us Judicator?”

“It has given human beings thirty days to choose to become One with it. It offers a peaceful existence without sickness, pain, or death. It is going to resurrect this Dead World and all things will become new.

Those who reject becoming One will receive the exact opposite. They will know utter horror and pain, because only in the One is there peace and life.

We all have thirty days. This is the choice. We must leave our life here and follow it to the Valley of Blood and the Tree of Atonement.

This is the creature’s message to the world.”

The crowd began to mumble amongst themselves. He watched as people argued about how to respond. No one knew what the tree of Atonement was or where the Valley of blood was located. Some wanted to follow the creature’s footsteps. Others wanted to run as far as they could in the opposite direction. Still others wanted to find Dr. Natas.

A woman yelled from the crowd. “Where is Doctor Natas Joshua?”

“He has fled.” Joshua didn’t know exactly how he knew, but he knew what Doc was planning. “He’s preparing to battle the creature in the Valley of Blood.”

Josh knew what he needed to do next. He had to find his people. He had to make sure they were safe.

Benton stared up at Josh. “What are you going to do Judicator?”

It was as if the whole crowd had heard the question and hushed to hear him respond.

“I believe the creature. I’m going to follow it.”

A man from the crowd yelled out. "How do you know what the creature said is true?"

Josh shook his head. "I just do. It has given me something inside of me that convinces me that it has, and will fulfill all of its promises. The creature and I are One."

The crowd began to unravel. What had become a somewhat manageable situation quickly turned back into a riot.

Someone in the crowd yelled that the Judicator had been infested with the creature and should be killed.

Hearing some threats against Joshua's life Benton spoke. "We need to get you out of here Judicator. Follow me." The Crawler pulled out his weapon and began firing in the air.

Those that had begun making their way towards the judicator halted. He pointed towards his patrol vehicle. "Get in Judicator. We'll be safe in there and can move you to a better location."

Josh followed the young man's lead and calmly walked to the patrol vehicle. He had designed them to be impenetrable cans. Benton followed closely behind him with his weapon drawn. People were screaming for them to save and help them.

Josh entered the vehicle and rolled down the window. He yelled out to the crowd. "Believe in what I have said. Do what I have told you and you will be saved. Ignore the message and you ignore the I AM what I AM's way for your salvation."

Benton rushed to the driver's side and jumped in. Locking the doors behind him he slammed on the accelerator and the unit left the pursuing crowd behind.

"You're going to have to tell me where to go Judicator?"

Josh responded. "Drive to the front gate and head out towards my farm house."

"I don't know where your farm house is sir."

“I should have known that you wouldn’t. I’ll lead you.” Looking down at the ground he noticed the green footsteps led all the way to the front gate which had been smashed through.

He couldn’t believe his eyes. The power and force that it would take to do such a thing was incredible. “Follow the green footprints of the creature. Something tells me that it will take us to where I am going.”

Benton couldn’t believe the chaos he was seeing. People were turning on each other. Some had set fire to buildings and others were fighting in the streets.

When order was removed chaos was left in its wake.

The smoldering pieces of the city gate were spewed out hundreds of feet into the distance. It filled him with fear.

“Do you think it’s a wise think to follow the creature Judicator?”

“You can call me Joshua.” He smiled at Benton. “I know for a fact it’s exactly what we have to do. It is the wisest thing anyone can do.”

CHAPTER 7

EDEN

They followed the trail of the creature's grassy footsteps all the way to the farm house. There were no signs of the UWH forces or evidence that they had battled the creature along the way.

Benton and Joshua exited the patrol vehicle.

Josh observed that the creature's footprints led into the house. Walking up the steps of his porch he noticed that his front door had been blown off of its hinges.

Knowing the force it would have taken to do such a thing he concluded that the creature must have done this. The UWH forces would have had to blow the whole front of the house off to get inside.

The same clean and sparkling spots the creature's feet had left at the University were also visible inside the house. They led straight into the bathroom where the tub had been ripped up and thrown through the wall.

"Are you sure this is such a bright idea?" Benton was questioning Joshua's uncanny assurance in the face of the destruction before them.

Joshua chuckled. "If the creature had wanted to hurt me or you it would have done so. I think it could have killed us all if it really wanted. It has something else in mind."

Benton looked confused. "Where does this lead Joshua?"

"This leads to the Underworlder's main hideout."

"How's that possible? They built a hideout right underneath the Judicator's house? Incredible!"

Josh smiled.

“What will be even more incredible Benton is when I tell you that I helped them build it and I am the leader of the Underworlder rebellion.”

Realizing what the Judicator was saying he jumped back and withdrew his weapon from his holster. He aimed it at Joshua. “Then you’re a traitor!”

Josh wasn’t startled at all by the young man’s reaction. “Am I Benton? Don’t be so surprised. We are all traitors and we have all been betrayed.”

Josh stepped down into the opening and onto the winding stairwell. He took notice that the lights were still working.

He also knew Benton wasn’t going to shoot him. He didn’t know how he knew. He just knew.

Benton lowered his weapon. He wasn’t sure exactly what to do. Everything he had known had fallen apart before his eyes. What he did know was that for some strange reason he trusted Joshua.

Out of all the people in the world he could fail to recognize he couldn’t believe he had failed to recognize the only person he had ever looked up to as a role model.

Judicator Joshua may have been known for his harsh punishments, but he was also known for his just decisions. The punishment always fit the crime when he judged.

He couldn’t say the same thing about Dr. Natas and the UWH guards. All of the people of Megapolis Alpha admired and looked up to the Judicator. They feared the Doctor.

Benton put his weapon back in his holster and followed Joshua down into the stairwell. “Then why Joshua? Why did you push so hard to find and kill the Underworlders if you were the one who was leading and protecting them?”

Josh knew he would have to answer this question one day. He just didn’t think it would be now and like this.

He talked as he walked down the winding steps. "I knew Dr. Natas' plans and intentions. He wanted to rule the world and everyone in it. My plan was to stop him. For me the best way to do that was at his side watching his every step.

He also wanted the Underworlders dead. I wanted them to live. I used my influence over him until the time was right for me to act and change the situation for the best for all."

"But Why?" Benton didn't understand.

"Because I love all people; Upperworlders and Underworlders alike, and I wanted them all to live in peace. Because no human being, or nation has the right to determine if a people are worthy enough to exist, or are worthy to be destroyed.

The Upperworlders wanted them dead, but the Underworlders hadn't committed any crime except that of existing and being what they were naturally born to be."

"What were they naturally born to be Judicator?"

"Human Benton! Human."

They reached the end of the stairwell and a figure jumped out of the shadows of the cavern startling them both. The person landed at Joshua's feet.

Joshua recognized him as the imposter that posed as Carmen. He was surprised Alex and Luke hadn't killed him.

"Stand back Benton." Josh placed his arm in front of Benton's chest and slowly pushed him back.

The imposter was on his knees and elbows with his face to the ground. "Forgive me Judicator?"

Josh was startled. "Forgive you?"

"I didn't know. I was only doing what I was told. I was only following what I knew. The creature said you were the gate and only through you could I be forgiven."

The young man looked up and they noticed something that looked like scales covering his eyes.

“The creature said my heart and mind were blind and as my heart and mind were, so would my vision be.

Now I can't see anything. He said if I will ask and receive forgiveness from you I will be able to see again.

Forgive me Joshua. I didn't know. All I know is that I can't see without your forgiveness. I was wrong.” The young man began crying uncontrollably. “I don't want to live like this. I would rather die.”

Joshua felt sorry for him. How could he know? He was only a pawn in the game of kings. “Then live, because I do forgive you.”

The scales immediately fell off the young man's eyes. He was so overjoyed that he jumped up and hugged the Judicator.

When he let go of him Josh noticed a blank stare come over the young man's face.

Looking towards Josh and Benton he said, “I have to go now.” He then rushed up the stairwell as fast as he could.

Benton looked confused. “Where do you think he's going?”

“I think he's going to tell his family and friends what they need to do.” Josh looking down saw the creature's footsteps. Everywhere the creature's foot had landed it left an imprint that was clean and new. “We have to follow them.”

Walking, Benton asked, “Do you think the world will really end in thirty days like the creature said?”

Josh responded. “All I know is that what was will be no more, and what will be, will be for a millennium. After this time all things will become new and last for eternity.”

Joshua noticed that much of the supplies the people were carrying had been dropped and left scattered.

Judging from the strides of the human tracks he deduced they had been running. The people probably saw the creature and in a panic rushed to escape.

They reached a cavern where the river ran through. Its waters rushed quickly by them as it disappeared into a slit in the cavern wall.

A few remaining rafts tied to wooden posts flopped on the water's surface.

Benton noticed burn marks from laser weapon shots on the wall. He stated the obvious. "They probably fired upon the creature. The creature's tracks lead into the water. It must have followed them as they tried to escape in the rafts."

Benton looked at the water crafts, the powerful current flow, and the open tunnel leading in the direction against the current, and he had to ask. "I have a question."

"I think I know what you are going to ask. How can you and I row against the current to follow the tunnel out and avoid getting sucked underneath tons of rock?"

"That's pretty much what I was going to ask."

"Everything isn't as it seems Crawler Second Class Benton."

"You can call me Peter."

Josh smiled. "Everything isn't as it seems Peter."

He agreed. "I'm beginning to understand that now."

"The lines that are tied to the boats are actually cables that can be attached to an electrical and mechanical movement system.

They are only tied off to posts to keep the boats from smashing against the rock face and to keep them near the shore.

There are wireless controls in each boat to start the system moving."

Josh unwrapped the steel cord from around the post and pulled the boat in closer to the edge of the underground shoreline. "Hop on board Peter."

Benton carefully crawled into the boat almost tipping it over. Josh handed him a section of the line and told him to hold on tightly. He held on with everything he had.

They kept the line tight between them. Benton knew if either one let go, then the boat following the current would hit the rock face and he and the wreckage would be sucked underneath and lost.

Josh took the other end of steel cord and walked up a small ramp that led to the caverns ceiling. There he connected it to an eyelet on a mechanical system that was attached to the cave's roof. Josh returned and stepped into the boat.

He watched as the Judicator grabbed a small object and pressed a button. He could hear the sound of the system moving. It began to draw the steel line and tugged it out of his hand.

After the boat jerked it slowly began to be pulled into the tunnel against the current.

Peter looked at Joshua. "I sure hope this cord is strong enough."

Josh chuckled. "If it wasn't, then I wouldn't have gotten in the boat."

Those words set him at ease.

He listened to the system moan and groan as it drew the boat into the dark tunnel.

The entire trip took twenty minutes. Finally they were pulled around a corner and into another dimly lit cavern where hundreds of boats like the one they were in had been drawn together against the shoreline.

Each water craft was tethered to those around it. Although the water continued to rush underneath them there was hardly any sign of its movement underneath the blanket of boats on its surface.

Peter could feel a strong breeze rushing past his face. He figured a cave entrance must be nearby.

Josh tethered the boat to two other craft and began stepping from one to the other to reach the shore.

Peter followed. They were both caught off guard when they heard laser fire in the distance.

Josh ran as quickly as he could. Screams and yells were heard in the distance. Arriving at the entrance of the cave he ran out into the darkness of the night and onto a scene he had to take a few seconds to decipher.

The creature sat in the middle of a clearing perched upon a large rock. It emanated a beautiful radiant light that lit up the whole glade. Grass and flowers had grown up around it and the green growth was continuing to spread before his eyes.

Some of the small children were sitting on the creature's lap and at its feet. Mothers of the tots were screaming.

Some of the armed men had surrounded the creature with weapons aimed, but seemed to have come to a point where they didn't know what to do next.

Rasha, Alex and Luke were conversing. It looked as if they were trying to figure out what to do. Rasha turned and happened to see Josh.

She screamed, "Joshua!" Running she jumped into his arms. She was so happy to see him she had forgotten about the situation. She began to cry into his chest.

"It's alright Rasha." He hugged her tightly. "Everything is alright now."

"Judicator," Luke spoke up, "we are so glad to see you. This creature chased us out into the open and has taken some of our children. We had to leave all of our supplies and food. We don't know what to do."

Josh held on to Rasha. "Take a group to retrieve the supplies. Don't worry about the creature. It isn't going to harm anyone."

The people had taken notice of him and began to quickly gather around him. Some of the mothers began pleading with him to do something.

Rasha collected herself and withdrew from him to wipe her face. "I told them not to be afraid."

Alex seemed confused. "Is this really what you want us to do Josh? Won't you need help dealing with the creature?"

Josh walked through the crowd that had gathered around him and towards the creature.

"I Am what I Am?"

The creature responded. "Yes?"

"You won't harm the children will you?"

"Of course not! I love them. No one should hinder the children from coming to Us."

Josh turned around to the crowd. "See! Everything is alright." The crowd seemed to calm down. Some of the mothers became brave enough that they even ventured close to the creature to get near their children. Some snatched their little babies and ran.

"I Am what I Am?"

"Yes Our Son?"

"Where are the children Becky and Brent?"

"They are safe in Us."

"What happens next?"

"You and Peter will be Our witnesses before the world. They will kill you both and three days later you will rise from the dead.

We will destroy Natas' physical body and crush his armies. The blood from their corpses will flow waist deep in the Valley of Blood.

For one thousand years We will be raised up and the world will live in Our Eden. Then Natas will be let lose once again to deceive the people of the world.

Those born among men and women will choose again their allegiance to Us or their denial of Us.

Natas will be destroyed a second time and will never know Our freedom and Our life again.

Then all things will become new for eternity.”

Josh’s jaw was hanging open. “That’s it? Well, sounds like an interesting plan. I can’t wait to see how it all turns out.” He whispered to himself. “This should be very interesting indeed.”

The creature continued to play with the children and said nothing.

Keep your eyes peeled for the second book in this series

NEW WORLD

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