

Novacadia

By

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CHAPTER ONE

She was panting heavily, and her muscles felt like they were on fire. Huge gulps of air could not seem to satisfy the huge depletion in her lungs, and the pain in her body, in her legs, in her arms, was almost intolerable, yet she knew that she could not stop, not unless she wanted to be caught by the astronauts and taken back to camp--an option she would not, under any circumstances, let herself consider.

She was in the North Forest; that meant that no one could have followed her unless they had done so on foot. But Earthmen were much more powerful physically than Novacadians--thanks in large part to their stronger gravitational pull, but also to biology.

Novacadians did not need to be strong to survive on their planet--or, at least, they didn't until the Earthmen began arriving.

The fauna was small and sparse, non-ferocious, and besides, Novacadians were vegetarians. It was the flora that

was so much larger here than on Earth. A plant resembling a fern could be found to be as tall as a redwood tree here, and trees--strong, thin--were sometimes as tall as the skyscrapers found on Earth.

Humans--most humans, that is--needed their strength to build houses, kill animals, and become attractive to the opposite sex. Novacadians lived in thatched huts. They ate from the many prolific digestible plants growing in the dense forests scattering the continent. And sex--a distinctly human activity--had never been necessary for the Novacadians to reproduce.

Eve swallow the largest gulp of air she could. She had been running for hours. Looking down at her dress, she noticed that the hem was torn and stained with blood.

She closed her large, black, almond-shaped eyes, damning her luck. The last thing she needed was an injury to slow her down. She re-opened them and looked around carefully, and saw the thick mist curling upwards in the warm, damp air. The sounds were those of the tree-dwellers, the small, furry animals that inhabited the forest. Their sounds were like soft moans, interspersed with high-pitched squeals, that echoed within the spaces between the trees.

She examined her wound. She was relieved when she saw that it was no longer bleeding, even though the gash appeared to be somewhat deep. She winced as she touched it, feeling a stab of pain ripping through her long, thin leg.

She wanted to go further, but lack of oxygen to her brain and overworked muscles were making her dizzy. Still panting, she fell to her knees.

In the forests of Novacadia, since the trees were so tall, most of any of the daylight there was obscured, leaving behind the effect of eternal moonlight, unless it was one of those times when all three suns--Jemiah, Arista, and Focal--were behind the planet. At those times, the forests would always be pitch-black. Eve wished for such a time right now. Her being a native, she knew her way around these parts, knew instinctively where to hide, which direction to run, but the Earthmen did not. In pitch darkness, she would be able to lose them more easily.

But no such luck right now. She had had enough of that when she had managed to escape their camp.

Closing her eyes once more, she focused her mind and called, *Papa! Papa!*

Her father had been one of those left behind, along with her sisters and brothers, in the hut they called their home. She could only imagine the horrible things the humans were doing to them right now. She prayed feverishly that they were alright, that the astronauts hadn't gotten to them yet.

They called themselves astronauts, and yet they were more like soldiers...savage, unrelenting. Their purpose in the beginning had been to commune with the Novacadians, but their purpose soon changed, when they realized that they could not communicate with these aliens in a way that satisfy them.

...Eve? she heard in her mind. Her heart leapt, speeding up with the knowledge that her father was still alive. A spark of hope filled her heart.

She closed her large eyes once more, centering her thoughts. In her mind she pictured her father's dear face, his kind, knowing eyes, his crinkled skin like creased parchment. *Papa, Papa, what are they doing to you? Are you safe?*

She heard, with only the clarity of a tin-can telephone connection, his thoughts. *Run, Eve. Don't worry about us. You must get as far away as you can. Run.*

But Papa, will you die? There was a pause.

I do not know, Eve. What's important is you right now. You are the key that will release us from millenia of imprisonment. You must protect yourself as readily as you can. You must get away.

She clung to his words like a child holding a precious doll. *What is happening to you?*

They are counting us. Soon they will discover that you are missing. You must cover as much ground as you can before they send out a search party for you and attempt to drag you back to camp. Again I say, don't worry about us. We will be alright. Save yourself. Save yourself from these horrible creatures.

Eve opened her eyes, and in a flash of understanding received a vision--her village, doused in flames, burning to the ground. It was not her own vision but that of her father's-- weak and like static. The Earthmen in their suits carrying

weapons herding the natives onto their ship, killing all who resisted.

Hold tight, Papa. Don't let go.

Before she had left, the Novacadians were confined to their houses. Powerful force fields were set in place, over the doors and windows so that they could not leave. They were prisoners in their own homes by night, slaves by day. Eve could not have stayed and let these monsters degrade her in this way any further, could not sit idly by and wait for them to lead her to slaughter.

They should not have been slaves to these physically superior beings. That would have been foolishness. But the Novacadians were far superior to Earthmen in a way that they passionately coveted--intellectually.

But to burn their village to the ground? *What did these humans want with us?* she wondered, speaking to no one in particular. *They have our dignity, they have our intellect, what more could they ask for?*

Anthony Harding peered at a reproduction of a Picasso painting which was hanging on his wall. It was chipped on the corners, and the paint was fading. Terrible reproduction.

Beside it hung the crucifix that his Catholic parents had left him before they had died. Anthony gingerly took it off the wall and laid it face-down on the table. He had never bought into their theology and now was certainly not a time to start.

He'd been up all night, worrying about the upcoming mission to Novacadia. They were supposed to leave tomorrow, provided the ship passed all its tests.

In all honesty, Anthony didn't know what to expect. He knew that ten years ago, when the astronauts first landed on Novacadia, the Novacadians were the first extra-terrestrial intelligent life ever to be discovered. Worldwide rejoicing ensued. He knew that, initially, the planet had been scoped out as a potential colony for humans--an alternate home for a planet that was rapidly heating up, rapidly becoming an unsuitable habitat for its living beings. The people of the world rejoiced, not only because the first discovery of intelligent life had been made, but also because they knew that in time, if need be, people could migrate to this new, temperate planet.

But if he were truthful with himself, he would admit that that wasn't the real reason he was up until insane hours of the morning, pacing in his apartment, rapidly going over notes.

It was Kate. For some reason, last night all he could think about was Kate, and their life together.

Five years ago she had been the shining presence in his life, the one happiness that seemed to bring meaning to his otherwise dull existence. She had been his wife, his lover, his friend, and one evening, without warning, she had been ripped away from him and from his life forever.

His car was old. Kate had been teasing him for months to break down and buy a new one--after all, he had the cash, didn't he?

It was an '08 Corolla and it served the basic purpose of transporting him to and from work. Besides, he loved that old thing. The new cars were faster and more fuel-efficient, but you couldn't gun the engine like you could the '08. And even though its safety features were behind the times, Anthony didn't see the risk in driving a vehicle that barely passed its inspection.

They were going out to dinner, going to meet her parents at a Japanese restaurant in downtown Chicago near where they lived. Kate was dressed in a lavender silk dress with spaghetti straps and rhinestones. She looked absolutely charming in it. He remembered eyeing her bare, shapely legs--all her pantyhose had been ripped or runned or potato'ed, and admiring them as they drove on the freeway towards the city at lightning speeds. Her earlobes were adorned with the diamond studs he'd gotten her for Christmas, and her golden-brown hair was waved, resting lightly on top of her shoulders.

Traffic was heavy, but moving swiftly. The speed limit was one-seventy, but most drivers were travelling at a swift two-hundred. Anthony chose to keep up with the pace, rather than snail it.

He looked over at her and she was touching up her makeup with a compact. He smiled, thinking in that moment how much he loved having someone ride next to him in his car. How much he loved having her in his life; how much he loved her.

It was late in Autumn, and the skies were already dark. Anthony glanced back at the traffic, not seeing anything

unusual. The lights that dotted the highway zoomed by, and everything looked just right.

But a drunk driver appeared out of nowhere. Travelling at high speeds, the car in front of theirs swerved from side to side, in and out of their lane several times. Anthony picked up his phone to call this jerk in.

Kate placed a hand over his. "Don't," she said.

"But he'll cause an accident."

She sighed. "He'll be in jail for life, what with the regulations these days. Just let the poor man go. He's not swerving all that much."

Anthony couldn't believe what his wife was saying, but he decided not to call the authorities anyway. But he kept a hawk's eye on the man in front of him, just in case.

But this proved to be his downfall. Not looking to his left, where the oncoming traffic was, he was unable to swerve to the right to avoid the truck that had crossed over the median.

It was all over in a split second. The head-on collision had sent their car into a tailspin, making it perpendicular with the traffic coming west, passenger's side vulnerable. Another collision, this one side-on, threw the car straight with traffic again, but not before a fourth car rear-ended them. When it was all over, six cars had been involved in the crash, and only one lane out of five was clear.

Anthony struggled to regain consciousness. All the air had been knocked out of him when the airbag inflated, and his head pounded.

As he came into realization, he looked over at his right.
Kate!

She was covered in blood. Her eyes were closed, looked like they were clamped shut. Anthony smoothed back her hair, shaking her. "Kate! Kate!" But she was lifeless.

He remembered screaming. He remembered scrambling for his phone. He remembered the ambulances coming, what seemed like years later, to pick up the body and transport the injured to the nearby hospital.

They admitted him to the trauma ward overnight to observe him.

But he had emerged from the crash essentially without a scratch on him. Like a dream, it was all over in an instant.

Now, in his bedroom, he remembered how much Kate had admired that Picasso painting, how she'd picked it up at a yard sale, cheap as it was.

A call came in. General Redding. He flipped up his console and peered at the man's face.

"Sir?"

"I hope you're ready for the mission tomorrow."

"Yes, sir."

"Get any sleep?"

"Actually, no. I was just going over some notes, and it took more time than I expected."

"Well, I advise you to try and sleep before reporting for duty at 0800 hours tomorrow."

"But I'm not tired," he protested.

"It's an order, not a suggestion," the general replied.

"Yes, sir," said Anthony. He closed the console, slipped out of his pants and crawled between the covers on his bed, then turned out the lights.

CHAPTER TWO

A girl was hovering over his bed. She had long, blonde hair that fell to her knees in soft waves, and huge, almond-shaped eyes that seemed to plead without a word having been said. Her skin was pale, so pale that it was almost blue, and her limbs were frail, weak. *A Novacadian?*

She opened her mouth to speak, and when the words came out her voice was sweet and melodic. "Help us," she begged. "We are enslaved."

Not a Novacadian. Novacadians didn't speak; they were a silent species. But her physical features were those of that race, and everything about her, except her voice, was alien.

Anthony was haunted by this person, this being, who lingered at the foot of his bed. "What is it you want?" he whispered, trembling.

She raised her hands to him. "You are the only one who can free us."

Anthony sat up into a darkened room, wearing only his shorts. His muscled arms were beaded with tiny drops of sweat. The drapes on his bay window were open, and he could see the

lights of the city from his bed. His dream...it had been so real.

He looked at his clock and saw that it was time to rise. He reluctantly got up, draped his robe over his shoulders, and padded over to the bathroom.

After he'd showered and dressed, he picked up his keys and his jacket and left the apartment, flipping off the lights as he closed the front door.

Driving to the base in the darkness of early morning, he found he took pleasure in watching the sunrise--the gradations of pink, amber, orange, and red that rose as the sun peeked up above a sullen landscape. He wondered how much longer humans would be able to enjoy watching that simple event before they would fry from the sun's heat in so doing. Global warming was no longer a theory, as it once was, it was a reality and a current threat. That was why Novacadia, untouched by man-made pollution, was being carefully considered as a colony, and that was the major reason why, Anthony assumed, he was going there.

He arrived at the front gates and showed the guard his identification badge. Once given the okay, he drove past the station and into the parking area. All of the visitors' spaces were full, he noticed. People come to watch the launch.

He pulled into his own reserved spot and killed his engine. Minutes later, a swipe of his pass card, and he was inside the massive stone building that was IAST--*International Aeronautics and Space Travel*. This administration building, which covered more than five football fields in length,

connected to an even larger building by train, where the launch would eventually take place.

Anthony wove this way through long corridors, listening to the echoing taps of his feet on the pristine linoleum floors, on his way to the de-briefing session. Hidden away on the fifth floor in the Southeast corner of the building was the staff room where he and his superiors would meet.

He entered the room to find his peers--those who would be travelling with him--already sitting down in a semi-circle in plush swivel chairs.

"Late, Harding?" Jackson joked. He was a black-haired baby-face with a huge smile that resembled that of a jack 'o lantern with all its teeth. Anthony looked around. The general wasn't in yet. He had come with plenty of time to spare.

"I see all of you are sucking butt," he said. "We've got ten minutes yet until the de-briefing session starts."

"Always cutting it close," said Andrews. "Didn't you remember that we're launching off today?"

Among the crew were two psychologists, Dick Andrews and Tony Peterson, two medical doctors, Jim Johnson and Kingston Smyth, and two spacecraft technicians, himself and Fred Jackson. The long-distance spacecrafts were not designed to hold but a few people at a time, and so the IAST only sent small teams on a mission at a time. Crew members were carefully selected ahead of time, and Anthony was chosen as this team's co-pilot.

General Redding walked into the sterile board room, stiffly and proudly. The team members rose from their feet as he entered, then sat when he indicated so.

He cleared his throat, scanning his light blue eyes over the room of six young men. "Good morning, gentlemen," he said, as he took his seat behind the podium. "Launch will resume promptly at 1600 hours today. There has been no delay. All of the inspections have indicated that everything is working in tip-top order."

A brief applause followed. Peterson raised his hand. "At what time will we need to board the shuttle?"

General Redding gave a nod. "1400 hours. I have a crew doing last-minute preparations on board right now."

"Sir," Anthony asked, without raising his hand. "Details about this mission have been rather vague. What exactly *will* we be doing on Novacadia?"

A tense silence followed. General Redding narrowed his eyes to him, lowering his chin. "The Novacadians have been giving us some trouble. As you all know, when we first landed on the planet, we had no means of communication with them, even though they appeared to be a highly intelligent life form. All of our psychologists were unsuccessful in trying to establish communication with them, even though our team of doctors worked steadily on the project for several years. Apparently, not only do they not speak, but they do not use sign language or any other means of observable communication. We are still trying to figure out how this race can become so advanced as to build

entire villages and live social existences without ever speaking to one another. But communication, at least to human beings, is crucial for any kind of progress, and to assess any dangers--and the latter is what is of most concern to us. So far, they appear to be a completely docile and peaceful race, but so long as we cannot share ideas with them, they are considered a military threat. So, to try and make contact with them, we began inserting communication chips.

"The communication chips are like radio transmitters, only they process and decode information within the brains of the Novacadians. Highly sensitive technology. But the natives resisted our efforts. Physically, of course, they cannot overpower us, and they have no weapons to speak of. But..." General Redding looked uncomfortable for a moment. "Rather, er, strange things have been happening."

"Such as?" one of the men asked.

General Redding's eyes darkened. "Several crew members have turned up missing, and we can only assume that the Novacadians are responsible." His tone was mysterious and secretive, as though he were leaving out tremendous and important blocks of information.

Silence permeated the room. "What measures have you taken to determine if it really was the natives who did this?"

"We have many reasons to believe that they are responsible."

"And have you done anything to try and control the problem?"

"We've been keeping them inside their homes on a twenty-four hour basis while the project to begin communication with them is under way. Until and if we can ever actually speak with them, we have no way to trust them and can only consider them a threat."

"And what is it that you want us to do?"

General Harding looked at the room of young men. "I want you to assess them psychologically and join the efforts to make communication. I want you to go under-cover."

"But how could we possibly go under-cover? Surely you don't mean pose as Novacadians."

"Of course not," he said. "That would be impossible. What I want you to do is pose as allies. Mingle with them and learn as much as you can about them. Remember, we need to establish relations with these people eventually if we ever want to colonize the planet. But, bottom-line, right now these aliens are our enemies."

CHAPTER THREE

Anthony left the room feeling bewildered. He had the distinct sensation that a lot of information was being withheld, but he couldn't pinpoint why he felt that way. He ate a healthy, liesurely lunch in the cafeteria and took the train over to the shuttle with time to spare.

Strapping into his seat and adjusting his headgear, Fred Jackson looked over at him. "You ready for this mission?"

"It'll be like any other, I suppose."

He gave him a sideways glance. "Have you ever seen a Novacadian?"

Anthony scratched his head. "No."

Jackson smiled. "They're just like old-timey versions of aliens who used to abduct people and make crop circles, only more human, with hair and teeth."

Anthony sat back in his seat. "So why don't they talk?"

Jackson snickered. "Maybe E.S.P. Maybe they're so intellectually superior that they can levitate objects with their minds. Maybe they can even travel to other worlds with their minds, you know? Hey, who knows, maybe it was them back then that people saw. It's possible, don't you think?"

Anthony shook his head and closed his eyes. "Don't get carried away. I'm sure these people are highly unimpressive."

Time came for launch, and as the craft was lifting off into space, the engines sounded like a thousand jets screaming in the afternoon air. The crew members remained seated until they were well out of the solar system, rapidly on a course for Novacadia.

Anthony had never seen this planet before. When the top hatch of the shuttle opened up, they were immediately greeted by a warm, misty air that quickly permeated the inside of the vessel. It smelled vaguely like moss and damp sage, only different, more rich.

He unbuckled himself and peered outside. The massive forest was miles away, but as visible as though it were a mountain range, considering the monumental size of the trees. In other directions, the landscape was flat and rocky. The soil was dry and cracked, resembling in some spots moist sand. The sky was pink with stripes of purple in which handfuls of stars were visible, and low-hovering, wispy clouds streaked the air overhead.

The air, similar in composition to that of Earth, was as pure as that of their 19th century, untouched by man-made pollution that had accumulated in the 20th and 21st centuries. Anthony felt invigorated as he took a deep breath, feeling for the first time in his life the sensation of breathing air with little resistance from his lungs.

His peers, one by one, came out to join him. "Home sweet home," one of them commented.

It was truly a beautiful sight. Not even a single building was around to taint the magnificent landscape. "Well, what do you think?" Andrews said, holding his helmet under his arm.

"I think it's spectacular," Anthony breathed.

"Wait till you see the aliens," he commented. "They're like nothing you've ever seen before."

They went back into the ship, gathered together their belongings, and went over their itinerary. Consulting a map, they determined that the village towards which they should be headed was due East.

They ate breakfast, washed up for the day and loaded the land vehicles with their baggage. The small vehicles held two people each, and Anthony paired up with Tony Peterson. With wind whipping in their faces, they scaled the flat, plantless ground in blinding speeds towards the village.

While they were on their way, Anthony realized that he felt almost weightless here. He expressed his curiosity to his fellow officer, who answered, "It's a smaller planet. The gravitational pull is less, similar to what you'd experience if you were walking on the moon."

He was well-studied about this new frontier in space-travel history, but he was fascinated with every new discovery and sight besides. A second sun was dipping behind the jagged horizon of the tall trees in the distance, and Anthony took this in with awe and appreciation.

Two hours later, still on even ground, they reached the campsite on the outskirts of the village the IAST had ironically christened "Communion."

Orange tents and huge, black vehicle rose up unnaturally against a peaceful background of swaying ferns and patches of barren soil. Dozens of groups of male and female astronauts hovered around the campsite wielding soldiers' uniforms and rifles slung over their shoulders.

The newcomers slowed their vehicles as they approached the massive campsite. Dust spewed out from underneath the tires, creating billowing clouds as they skidded to a halt before the manned entrance to the camp.

Anthony said over his shoulder in surprise, "They're armed. Why is that necessary?"

"Don't you remember what the general told us?" his partner answered. "Perhaps these Novacadians have been giving them more trouble than we had thought."

They stepped out of the vehicles, approached the two armed men at the entrance and identified themselves.

"We've been expecting you," they said. "We need all the help we can get over here. Come inside."

The men were led inside an orange tent, where a man in fatigues was sitting at a desk scrawling some notes. As they entered, he rose and asked them to sit down.

"I trust you've all made it safely here after a long journey from Earth."

"All and all in one piece," Smyth said.

"Are you enjoying the air here? There's nothing more pure on Earth except what you can get from machines," he said.

"When do we start?" Anthony asked.

The man in fatigues finally took a seat. "Tomorrow morning," he said seriously. "We're in over our heads as it is, and the sooner you all can start, the better it will be for the situation."

The man, General Garrison, looked severe and unforgiving. Frown lines on his forehead looked like trenches that had been dug into his skin. This man seemed as secretive and hesitant to disclose information about their mission as General Redding had been, and therefore alarms went off in Anthony's mind.

"What is it you want us to do, exactly?"

The general snapped shut the fountain pen he was holding in his hands. "When one of my men shows you the village, everything will be explained to you."

"Why all the weapons? Are the Novacadians dangerous?" Anthony asked. "It seems that we've been getting mixed messages: they're peaceful, but they've been causing trouble."

He nodded his head. "It's something we still haven't gotten to the bottom of. What's for certain is that we need to have the necessary arms ready in case resistance does break out."

"General Redding informed us of some strange happenings. Is it true that some of your men have disappeared, and that you believe that the Novacadians are to blame?"

He stare straight into Anthony's eyes. "We don't just believe that they are to blame, sir, we know it." He shifted his gaze to the door to the tent, which was flapping in the wind. "Of, course, how they did it we don't know. All that we know is that they are responsible."

They were taken during the night into Communion. At first sight, it was not spectacular. Hundreds of thatched huts sat on top of the cracked soil, huddled together in groups of eight or more. Most of them were lit from within, and to Anthony, it looked like a primal village of Earth days gone past.

As they rode into town on the back of a heavy tank, the first thing they noticed was that no one was outside. "Where are all the people?"

"Due to precautions, they're all confined to their houses at night, barred by force fields."

"And during the day?"

"We attempt to communicate with them."

Anthony did not ask what methods they were using to try and communicate with them. But he soon found out: as day broke out after a short night, he caught his first glimpse of one of the Novacadians.

Stepping out of one of the huts uncertainly, there appeared a pale, gangly creature with whitish, stringy hair and loose clothing. It was barefoot and bare-legged, with huge, expressive eyes and a sad expression. As Anthony watched, an astronaut with a rifle hung over his shoulder came and forcibly pulled the alien out of its house and onto the pavement of the road. With the butt of his gun, he coerced the alien onto his truck where he was then tied up in chains.

This was not what Anthony had imagined when he was first informed of the mission. The violence with which aliens were randomly being taken out of their houses, away from their families, and driven away was beyond what Anthony considered humane.

"Where are they taking them? What are they going to do to them?"

"You'll see. We're taking them to camp. There we're going to continue our experiments."

"It's savage," Anthony commented.

"Exactly the opposite," the officer argued. "It's for the good of our planet. If we ever want to colonize Novacadia, which becomes ever-increasingly more apparent that we need to do, then we need to dispose of any threats to that goal. And Novacadians are a threat."

Anthony wondered how these creatures, who looked so frail and so peaceful and unassuming, could be a threat.

"What type of experiments do you perform?"

"You'll see. It has mostly to do with their communication chips."

"Do they all have them?" Anthony felt a shiver run down his spine.

"All of them."

CHAPTER FOUR

Eve woke up to the light of all three suns shining through the tops of the trees. She had slept for nearly eight hours, and all her muscles were sore from having ran for the entire day yesterday.

She was not accustomed to the silence in her head. Before the days of the humans, constant whisperings were a background to any solitary life and were a permanent part of everyone's existence.

But when those chips had first entered their brains, communication had broken down to little more than a few sentences to each other at a time--stronger, of course, if the bond between the two was stronger. Love magnified all communication between two Novacadians, made the voices louder, more coherent.

The less she heard from her father, the more concerned she became. The love between them was so strong that it had endured multiple operations, and though the whisperings of others had died long before, she still heard his voice in times of urgency.

The experiments that the humans performed on them were gruesome, considering that the Novacadians' primary source of strength and sustenance were their bonds between each other. They ate little, required little water, and if it were not for the intervention of the humans, they would live for hundreds of years. Love surrounded them, empowered them, sustained them. They fought no wars. They had no disagreements. There were little threats to their peaceful existence. But humans carried with them the threat so violent and so powerful that it could wipe out the entirety of the Novacadian race: hatred.

That was something that the humans did not understand: it was not the crude implants they inserted that stripped them of their power: it was the hatred that they communicated to them through these implants that left them blind, vulnerable and naked. For the first time ever among their race, a new, fearsome emotion was poisoning and killing them, one by one. And the accidents were only symptoms of the illness that was

beginning to become the plague that would be destined to kill them all in due time.

The accidents were merely outpourings of passionate emotions. Several Novacadians already had fallen victim to its spell. Inspired by the evil intentions of the humans and in reaction to the tortures they were imposing on them and their family members, three humans were killed.

But it was hatred, not love, that had enabled them to do this. In all reality, Novacadians could have wiped out these planetary intruders with the strength of their collective intellects, but they had chosen not to do so because to have done so would have weakened and hurt them. However in time, the actions of the humans would prove to do just that anyway.

She began to panic. On her knees, she called for her father again and again, but there was no answer. She began to suspect, with growing certainty, that she had to go back. She may have been the one they were trying, above all, to protect, but the fear and concern she felt for her father and brothers and sisters was intolerably weighing on her heart. She couldn't see them fall victim to the evils of the astronauts' mind-control schemes, hear their writhings of agony as they fell to hatred.

It wasn't a new world that the humans wanted. They wanted power. Novacadians possessed great power within their minds, and the humans wanted to harness it. Under a guise of trying to establish communication with the first intelligent alien life form ever discovered, they were trying to unlock the mysteries

of their race. But they would not find it, so long as they were stained with the blood of their evils, which were infinite.

Eve slowly got to her feet and stood on shaky legs. She was perhaps the most powerful being on the entire planet and yet she still felt the burn of overexertion.

"Bless me, Father, for I have sinned." The chaplain was a nervous and eager man, with pale hands and a sallow face. Anthony gave confession not because he believed in it, but because it was a routine that had been drilled into him when he was a little boy. It provided some relief, which he did not really understand since he did not believe in the existence of God, but mostly he did it out of respect for his departed parents, who, he imagined, would have wanted it that way.

CHAPTER FIVE

After praying the rosary meaninglessly in his cabin, he put on a clean shirt and hopped onto a land vehicle. He wanted to see the village another time, to put to rest some of the uneasiness he felt about this mission. He didn't know what he was looking for, just that it was going to be something to prove that this wasn't all just some power-trip on the part of the astronauts.

When he got there, several armed astronauts were roaming the streets, but the Novacadians were nowhere in sight.

"Lockdown," a man said, when he asked. "Someone has turned up missing, and we're on high alert."

He heard a commotion coming from one of the huts. The barking of orders and a symphony of loud shouts could be heard all the way down the street. Anthony followed the noise to see what was going on.

They were restraining a frail old man with short white hair and wrinkled skin. It took seven men to hold him down, even though the impossibility of this situation was all too apparent to Anthony. His limbs were as skinny and loose as snakes, and the hollowness of eyes and the sunkenness of his skin revealed a greatly advanced age. Why it required that many men to restrain someone who looked like he could barely lift his own body was a mystery to him.

"Help us," a man said. "He's found a way to break the force field."

Anthony didn't know what to do. The man looked kind and desperate. If he were fighting against the astronauts, he looked like he was fighting in self-defense.

The man looked at him with his large, almond-shaped eyes and in that moment Anthony had the distinct sensation that he was trying to communicate something to him, something important. They struggled against the wall, pinning the man into a corner, roughly clamping his arms behind his back. He watched as the men used the butts of their guns to strike him on the head and drag him into the bedroom, where they tied him to the mattress.

Sprawled out in a pentacle, black blood trickling from his head wound, the man was completely unconscious.

Scurrying Novacadian females in long dresses hovered around the door to the bedroom, peering at him with their large eyes. If only they could speak, Anthony thought, then perhaps this would not have happened. Not only did they not speak, but they did not scream, or groan, or utter any kind of sound from their mouths. Their feeble hands made no movements that could be construed as sign language, and their bodies spoke no language in their postures. It was a inconceivable to Anthony. How did they live under the same roofs? How did they coordinate their actions? How did they arrange their families, when they spoke nothing to each other? Perhaps fear of the unknown was a motivation for the experiments that the astronauts conducted, Anthony thought.

When the commotion was over, he wandered away from the other astronauts. He'd come here seeking answers, but it only furthered his conviction that something here was definitely not right. Unzipping his pants to get ready to relieve himself, he heard a rustling in the ferns. He raised his eyes, highly aware that it might be one of the tree-dwellers scurrying on the outskirts of the forest. They were docile animals, but their teeth were as sharp as knives, and you didn't want to get caught near one, especially a pregnant one.

He took a step back, zipping back up his pants. Steadying his focus on where the rustling had come from, he saw a pale form rushing between the spaces of green. Tree-dwellers had

black-and-grey coats with long, furry tails. Interested, he stepped further into the thick forest of ferns.

She stepped out, and uttered the first sound that he had ever heard a Novacadian make: a gasp.

He grabbed her wrist. She tried to pull away, but he was five times as strong as her. She twisted and resisted his grasp hopelessly, gnashing her teeth in frustration.

She was a Novacadian! But her hair was long and blonde, very human-like. Her pale, flawless skin made up the texture and shape face of a porcelain doll. Her eyes, just like those of the man who had just been brutalized, were dark, large, and expressive. Her lips were full, soft, pink, and she was tall; taller than the females he had previously seen in the hut. And she was prouder, somehow: whereas the women in the hut wore sad expressions on their faces and in their eyes, she had the added dimension of fierceness, valor in her demeanor.

With a clarity of memory that had previously not been present, he remembered his dream. "You're the girl in my dream," he said incredulously. He started to take her back to the village.

"No, no, please don't," he heard. When he spun around, her mouth was closed.

"Did you just say something?"

He watched as she said, still with lips unmoving, "What you and your men are doing is torture to us. Please don't take me back. They will kill me if I return."

The words were clear as though she had spoken through a microphone, and yet Anthony had to blink to make sure she really hadn't opened her mouth. "You...can communicate."

She pulled her wrist away from his grasp. "Please release me. I will cause you no harm."

The wheels were turning inside his head. "My partner was right," he said. "You use E.S.P." He began to pace. "But you are the one who escaped, and I have to bring you back. Many people are looking for you."

"Please," she said. "I cannot explain everything to you right now. All I can tell you is that it is detrimentally important to both of our races for you to let me go."

"Where will you go?" Anthony asked, finding himself somewhat spellbound by this thin, angelic creature.

"Far away. To a place where I will be safe, so that in the future all of my people will never be in danger again."

"Take me with you," Anthony said impulsively. "I'll help you. If an astronaut comes along, I can protect you from him."

Her body language was reduced to a sad, fierce, wise look in her eyes that seemed to penetrate him to his very soul. She made no movements with her body but stood serenely still, not even making use of hand movements to illustrate her silent speech.

She was wearing a long, white dress that was torn at the hem. Sticky black blood stained the ends of the fabric, and Anthony said, "You're hurt."

She didn't even shake her head. "I must go."

CHAPTER SIX

She had come to see if her family was alright and she had seen with her two eyes that they were still alive, but barely. Her father had been beaten to unconsciousness, but she prayed that he would heal and rise to his former strength. She had done what she came to do, and now she knew she must leave again.

This man, this human, even at first glance she knew that he was different. He was receptive to her telepathy from the start, which made him unlike all the others. His aura indicated great passion and suppressed bravery. There were two ways this man could react: either he would take her back to camp, where she would again become a prisoner of savages, or he would let her go, and relying heavily on her intuition, she made a plea for the latter.

"Take me with you," he said again, again grasping her wrist.

She twisted free. "Why should I trust you?" she said with vehemence.

"Because I haven't turned you in to the authorities. Why would I offer to help you simply to lead you back home afterwards and then turn you in?"

She lowered her long lashes. "You are a human. Your ways are evil and poisonous to us. As soon as you have the

information you want from me, you will report it right back to your commanding officer."

He looked at her with tenderness. "That's not what I'm going to do." He then looked at her more closely. "What is your name?"

She trembled a little bit, looking defensive. "What is it important to you?"

"I'm only wondering how to address you," he said. "I have a name. It's Anthony."

She stood up straighter. "They call me Eve. I was born on the eve of a great holiday."

He extended his hand, but she only stared at it. "Tell me, Eve, why is it that that old man I saw was able to overpower seven men?"

To that question she stayed silent.

"You don't trust me, do you?" he said.

She answered in a smooth voice. "You have not yet given me a reason to." But he had. Simply the fact that he could hear her voice within his mind was an indication of a bond between the two of them, but Eve wouldn't dare tell this human man that.

The winds swept through the gigantic ferns, rustling their leaves as the two of them stood there, standing silent.

"We'd better get going if we don't want to be seen by the astronauts."

She hesitated. "What will they say when they see that you are missing?"

"I'll tell them I'm going on a scientific expedition."

Just then an officer came close. "Harding, what are you doing back there?" he shouted.

He pulled away from Eve and shouted, "Just taking a piss, officer!"

Eve, then, was drowned with thoughts of her father. The strength he had displayed earlier came from emotions closer to hatred than to love, of that she knew. Hatred, when mixed with intense intellectual concentration, could create fireworks. Her father's tremendous strength was just one of the ways it could be manifested. Other ways, when the hatred was very pure, were enough to kill a man and more, but the aftermath...the aftermath of it would weaken and destroy the person from whom the emotions had come from.

Love, when mixed with intense intellectual concentration, created powers--but not of the destructive type. It created telepathy, longevity, health, peace, harmony. All of the things that the Novacadians needed to survive. But her father was dangerously teetering on the fence between the two opposing forces, and Eve knew that hatred could be as seductive as a glass of water to a man dying of thirst. She knew all too well. She had seen three of her friends succumb to hatred. Within hours, all three were killed by the astronauts.

The man was shaking her lightly. "Well, should we go? Or do you want to go back to camp after all?"

She snapped back into consciousness. Taking a last look at the village in the distance, she said, "Let's go."

CHAPTER SEVEN

They covered a lot of ground quickly in the land vehicle. They were headed towards the mountains, the range East of Communion and the North Forest. Eve seemed purpose-driven and determined as she directed his path, but she would not yet reveal to him what lay amidst those mysterious-looking, looming, rocky slopes. Here the soil was yellow with sulfur, and the air had a particularly pungent odor to it. Along a river whose waters were so clear that it looked like liquid glass, they scaled the miles that would lead them to the foot of a small, rocky peak as wind whipped through their hair and batted against their faces.

"Over here," she said when they had stopped, and dismounted the vehicle.

"Where are we going?"

"This way. There are still some of us who are unimprisoned by man, and they live in these caves."

Anthony turned off the hydro-powered engine. "According to my studies, it was believed that every inch of this small planet had been explored, and Communion was the only gathering of Novacadians in existence."

She smiled, and it was the first time he had ever seen a Novacadian smile. "Their explorations were not comprehensive enough. Some of us got away."

She led them to the mouth of the largest of the three dark caves that looked like the eyes of a skeleton. Gigantic ferns partially covered its entrance, and as they went in, they pushed past the soft green leaves and ducked their heads underneath the thick, fibrous veins.

It smelled dank and moldy, but it was a preferable smell to the sulphur of outside. Everything was dark. But as Eve led him further and further into the darkness, he did not feel fear. After a few minutes of walking, when the walls of the cave constricted and the ceiling became lower, Anthony thought he saw a soft, glowing light. As they got closer to it, there was no mistaking it: up ahead lay a flickering, amber glow that grew brighter as he watched.

And then the music. It was melodious, soft; a combination of breathy altos and humming baritones singing sweetly amidst a kind of wind instrument that Anthony could not identify.

As they entered the massive room with high ceilings and a broad expanse, Anthony heard the sound of a multitude of cheers of joy erupting all around.

It was a huge room. It reminded Anthony of a cathedral, with its high walls and monstrous stalactites hanging like buttresses from the stony ceiling. Packed in like a congregation on Easter Sunday were the people. Sitting and standing in clusters of a dozen or more, they filled the cavern in all of its corners and niches. Upon their entrance, groups of Novacadians jumped up from their seats and ran to embrace Eve. Anthony could only stand back to watch as an older woman

appeared and placed a wreath of flowers over Eve's head. One by one, they approached and led her by the hand, proceeding to dance with her, draping garlands around her neck and clothing her in expensive-looking cloaks.

The Novacadians were everywhere. They looked just as poor as the ones in Communion, with torn clothing and dirty faces, but they all gave up their nicest garments to place them upon Eve, who strode amongst them and danced with both the women and men.

She was easily the most beautiful woman in the cave of at least a hundred occupants. She walked and even danced with dignity and valor, and had a fire in her eye that was unmatched even by all the human women that Anthony had ever seen before.

He looked all around for the source of the heavenly music, but instead found everyone in the room of the cave in a state of rejoicing. The voices, he figured, had come from his mind. But the instrument? Where was that? He could not find it anywhere.

He found himself hovering against the wall, simply watching the festivities. Obviously, they held Eve in high esteem. He watched as they took off the garland of flowers and placed a gold crown on her head, then urged her to have a seat at the back of the monstrous cave. He had never seen anything like it.

Then, when he was completely taken off guard, a young girl grasped him by the hand and led him through the dancing crowd of people and up, beside Eve, they told him to have seat.

An old woman approached them and said, "He can hear us because of the bond between the two of you, Eve."

Several people put garlands around his neck. "What does that mean?" he said to her.

Eve nodded. "I have not explained it to him yet," she said.

"The bond?"

"It means," she said, turning her head, "that there is love between us. Otherwise you would not be able to hear my voice, and you would not be able to hear the voices of all these people."

Anthony looked at her. "Am I the first human ever to hear a Novacadian voice?"

The look in her eyes was suddenly fierce and serious.

"Yes, Anthony."

The weight of this knowledge sank in like an anchor sinking to the floor of the sea. "But I have to help you," he blurted. "Earth thinks you have no means of communication, and that's why they're inserting computer chips into your brains. They consider you a threat so long as you appear intelligent and don't communicate. I have to tell them that you do communicate, just not in the ways that they had thought."

"No," she said emphatically. "You must not do that. You will be endangering yourself."

"But how?"

She did not answer.

"They brutalize you," he said. "They keep you prisoners in your own homes. If I tell them that you use telepathy, then perhaps they will leave you alone."

"That's not how it will happen," she said. "They will only continue with their experiments, and if they learn that you can hear us, they will use you for their purposes."

"They won't insert a communication chip into my brain."

"I know that, but--"

"But what?"

She had an old, weathered look about her just then. "You would be vulnerable, like we are, if they use you."

He was frustrated. "What do you mean?"

Just then the music started up again. The voices were so beautiful that despite how desperately Anthony wanted to get more information out of Eve, he could not help but sit back to listen to it.

Mouths unmoving, a chorus of men and women sang songs that could never have been created on Earth. Again, he heard the wind instrument, but it was nowhere in sight.

"What is that wind instrument?" he asked.

"It is part of their collective mind energy. They created it," she said.

The words were strange, and sad. They sounded like prayers. Anthony realized that they were praying about Eve, but their words were spoken so quickly that he did not understand them.

"What are they praying about?" he asked, whispering to Eve.

Her tone was solemn. "They are praying for the prophecies to come to pass."

"What prophecies?"

She turned to him. "That I die a brutal death in order to save the entirety of my race."

Anthony stared at her, not even gasping. He looked at her, with her pale, frail limbs and now uncertain posture, her big, sorrowful eyes, and her hair so long and pale and wavy that at first glance one would think it to be artificial. This was not a girl who was supposed to die. She was a princess. She deserved all the riches and affections that these people were giving her and more, but not because she was supposed to die a horrible death in order to free them.

When he finally found his voice, he said, "Are you their...messiah, then?"

"If you mean the one who will set them free, then yes."

His mind inevitably locked onto his Catholic upbringing. "You know, on Earth, many of us consider that a man named Jesus Christ was the messiah."

She folded her hands in her lap. "Every planet has their own messiah," she said. "Jesus Christ may be yours, but here my people are still undelivered."

"Tell me," Anthony said. "Do you think you are the messiah? Or is this just what others have been telling you?"

"The prophecies say that it is so. In the past, they were never wrong."

Coming from a human (or even another Novacadian, he came to realize), the statement would have come as a show of pride or as a delusion of grandeur. But the innocence with which she put forth her belief and the silent passion with which she seemed to feel it left Anthony dumbfounded and with a feeling of incredulity. Her humble acceptance of the prophecies did impress him, but nevertheless he got the sense that she was more like a child accepting the existence of the Tooth Fairy or Santa Claus.

Eve's acceptance of the prophecies did not disturb him. What disturbed him, however, was the attitudes of the other Novacadians in the cave. How could they, if it really were to happen, let her die?

Anthony thought about his meager upbringing and knowledge of the Christian faith. Jesus, he knew, died a horrible death, but it wasn't as though his followers were rejoicing in his pain, was it? They weren't pushing him to the cross, were they?

He stopped himself. He knew this tiny creature that sat beside him so delicately and with a look of pure innocence with her rose-petal lips was not a messiah. The Novacadians were a peaceful race, but if there was any indication of their having a dark side, this was it. He felt overwhelmingly in that instant that they were taking advantage of her, stringing her along and using her for their means, and she, in pure faith, was buying

into it. He suddenly felt the overpowering desire to protect her by any means necessary, only he realized, who from?

Years before humans had ever had the ability to explore habitable new worlds, they had dreamed about scientific experimentation on aliens. If only they then knew that their flights of fancy would come to pass, and in a vulgar way, perhaps a kind soul would have put a stop to the hostile depictions of alien life and portrayed them as friendly and cooperative instead.

"Eve, can't you *try* to speak to the men and women at camp? They've got to know that their experimentations are hurting you." His lips were the only ones moving in the entire massive room.

"We cannot," she said simply.

"Are you planning on retaliation?"

Even though she sat still, he face was white and soft.

"That is not our nature." She looked away.

"But?"

"But something will happen if your men continue to hurt us."

"You will fight back?"

"If my people are drawn into your hatred, the sickness will take hold of their hearts, and horrible things could happen."

Anthony sat back in his seat. "What does that mean?"

Eve stood up and closed her eyes. "Watch," she telepathed to him. He heard a low rumbling that sounded like an avalanche

or a steam-roller charging through the echoing walls of the cave. Thinking that there was a great earthquake, he braced himself. But suddenly, the cave that had been filled with the warm, yellow light of several torches became filled with an even brighter, more distilled light. A fresh, cool breeze blew by his face, rustling his loose clothing and sandy hair, and all at once he felt the sensation of being lifted up, sailed through the air. Above him, the ceiling of the cave opened up and he could see the blazing orbs of two suns shining down upon them as well as the spine-like tops of some forest trees. Anthony's breath was taken away.

"How did you do that?" he asked, trembling.

Eve slowly opened her eyes, her pale skin now touched with pink. When she sat down, her internalized voice was calm.

"There are many other things we can do," she said plainly.

Anthony tried to regain his composure. "You mean...you did that...with your mind?"

"Mind energy is very powerful," she said. "When you concentrate your thoughts with purity, you can accomplish most things."

Anthony realized he had shrunken away from her. "Then why don't you use your mind energy to escape from the astronauts?"

She opened her mouth slightly, but of course no sound came out. "They have weakened us, Anthony. They have weakened us to the point where we don't know how to defend ourselves unless it is out of hatred. But if my people all succumb to the powers of

hatred, we will all die. The only thing that can save us now is love."

He was piecing it together. "So this retaliation you spoke of...does it have to do with the mind energy?"

Her face looked pained. "We cannot do anything with our minds that is not ruled by our hearts," she said. "Therefore, if Love is our master then we cannot fight back against your men. But if Hatred becomes our master, then we will be able to fight with our minds against you before the flicker of our consciousness goes out. We gain immediate freedom, but at the price of eternal imprisonment."

"We are just men," Anthony said, opening his palms.

Eve looked at him. "And we are just Novacadians."

And there was love between the two of them. But how could that be? He had only just set eyes upon her for the first time a few hours ago. But deep within, he knew that there was some truth to it. He felt a kinship with her already that should have been unnatural, but felt perfectly normal and comfortable and as though it had been planned for a long time. There was a common link between the two of them, but he was yet to discover it, he knew.

He thought, suddenly and strangely, of Kate. Kate with her bright brown eyes, her raw laugh, and her overly forgiving nature. The time when he'd been with her he was a different person, more open and free, less withdrawn, less suspicious of everything and everyone.

"I know what you are thinking about," Eve said gently.

"Look," he said. "I know that you all are in a lot of trouble, and I'd like to help you. I'd like to do anything I can." His mind flashed back to the dream in which Eve told him that only he could save them.

"I am the messiah," she said, "not you."

"Then why did you ask for my help?"

She looked troubled. "When?"

"In my dream."

She paused for a very long time. "When did you receive this dream?"

"Right before we left to come here."

She looked frightened then. "It was not me," she said. "I never spoke to you in a dream." She moved her head from side to side. "I would have known had I tried to communicate with you in such a way."

Anthony was confused. He took her hand. "Why are you frightened?"

She shook her head. "I am not."

CHAPTER EIGHT

From inside the airbase hovering just above Novacadia's upper atmosphere, one could see the curvature of the planet and the swirls of weather fronts that looked like curls of steam on a pot of stew. The planet was covered seven-eighths by water and the rest was mostly jungle. Looking like green patches on an aqua globe, these land areas were few and far between. After

the initial touchdown on their planet ten years ago, the humans had concentrated their searches only to the regions where life would be possible--namely, the temperate region around Communion. "Sir, the equipment has arrived from Earth."

General Garrison was in a bad mood and he'd had seven cups of coffee too many. When the young lieutenant had arrived at the doorway of his quarters, he'd smoothed back his tousled hair and glued a fake look of enthusiasm on his face. He had no patience for the young ones--they were overly confident and, in his opinion, full of themselves. "The new technologies we needed to scope out the planet?" he asked, trying to sound authoritative.

"Yes, sir."

"Good. It will help us in our search for the escaped Novacadian. We've scanned the North Forest, the plains and the mountains, and so far we've had no sign of her. Have your men installed it yet?"

"They've just finished. You can take a look for yourself." The Novacadian in question had not been a target for suspicion in the beginning. She was smaller than the rest, with tiny limbs and a frail posture. She had a habit of blending into the background. If there was any indication of the Novadians having personalities, hers would be meek and subservient. But when she'd escaped, all of the astronauts were baffled. All of the others who'd attempted to do so had first made some sort of violent outburst. She, on the other hand, had quietly slipped away in the middle of the night. In General

Garrison's mind, that made her even more dangerous than any of the others. It showed quiet rebellion and intelligence that the others did not have.

The general peered onto his console and logged into the new system. He then began the precise steps needed to operate the new technology that he had been trained for back on Earth.

"Holy Mackerel," he said, as the green lights filled the console. The lieutenant had no idea what it meant.

"What does it mean, sir?"

The general, who was wearing only his shirt and pants, put his coat on. "Now, I'm not sure if this is correct," he said, straightening his collar. "But it's worth looking into. If this new technology is any good, then those green lights mean life."

"You mean...there are others?"

"That's exactly what I mean. Get your troops together, lieutenant. There's going to be a war."

In the cave, the festivities continued. Anthony noticed a sad note to their celebrations, as though they were hopeful and at the same time mournful. He looked at their faces, which looked so human. The main thing that distinguished their appearances from the humans was their huge, expressive eyes and blue-white skin. Even when they were experiencing great joy, though, they looked sad.

He was still shaken by the ceiling of the cave disappearing and then coming back, but to these creatures it was

normal. He wondered what else, what other wonderful things they were capable of. He wondered what made Eve so special.

Eve opened her eyes at one point. "Anthony, there's going to be trouble."

"What do you mean?"

She looked worried, unusually so, and he realized with startling clarity that he could sense her emotions; he could sense her great concern.

"What's going to happen?" He heard his voice echo as though he were the only person in the room. If a human had been there, he or she would have thought that Anthony was crazy, talking to people who didn't talk back. But he could hear their voices without uttering a sound as clearly as though they were shouting them. But before Eve could answer him, several people approached her with garlands, wanting to take her to the dance floor. "What's going on? Tell me what's going on."

She peered over her shoulder as the group led her away.

"Anthony, we're about to be invaded."

Anthony stared after her. "Who?" he breathed.

"Your men."

Anthony stood up, letting a garland of flowers drop to the floor. He followed her. When he caught up to her, he placed a hand on her shoulder. "Then we have to stop it."

"There's no way," she said. "There's no use frightening these people or getting their hopes up. Plus, they're about to join their families. It's what's meant to happen."

"Can't you leave the cave, run away?"

"There are too many of us. We will be seen. If we are not seen, your equipment will detect us. We have nowhere to go. Besides," she said, raising her hand, "they already know."

He gasped. "Is it because I came here?" he said. He looked down, feverishly throwing his gaze left and right. "I can't believe I was so stupid! I've just endangered all of you!"

She placed her hand on his. "It's not your fault. It was bound to happen at some point."

"But what about the prophecies? Aren't you supposed to, like, set them free or something?"

She looked at him seriously. "If that is meant to happen, then it will happen," she said, and then added, "even though I know you don't believe it."

Anthony snatched his hand away. "I hope you free them, Eve, but I don't wish that you die a horrible death. Honestly, I think it's cruel and ignorant. I'm sorry I can't have respect for your...er...religion, but that's just how I feel."

She kissed his cheek. "Dance with me, Anthony."

"Right before you're taken back into custody?"

"I won't be able to when I'm a slave."

"Human beings would never refer to this as slavery, you know."

"I know. It's for science, right?"

Clasping her small hands and pressing his body against hers, the last thing in the world he would have thought he'd be thinking about right now was the fact that Novacadians didn't

have sex. But her smell was so clean and intriguing--a mixture of sage and something similar to lavender--and her body was so light and graceful, that he had to close his eyes to savor the feel of her in his arms. Sex with an alien. Now there was a thought.

He realized with abruptness that Eve probably knew what he was thinking about, since she had done so before, but suprisingly, he didn't care.

What surprised him most was that he ended up caring so much about the welfare of these aliens, who, only hours earlier, he knew so little about, and with what amount of passion, too.

When he was a little boy he had a "Mars Attacks" poster hung up on his wall. If only he had known, then, that the little green men would turn out to be an intriguingly beautiful woman.

"You have bravery, Anthony," Eve said, as they were dancing. "Perhaps your dream was not an accident after all."

CHAPTER NINE

An hour later the cave began trembling. Anthony recognized the low rumbling noises as land vehicles swarming to the mouth of the cave. This time when the walls and the ceiling shook, it was not a product of the Novacadians' mind energy--it was the astronauts coming to take them all away.

They had had nowhere to go, and so they were virtually sitting ducks in the cave they had called their home for many

months--ever since the first of the Novacadians had been enslaved and many of them had managed to escape.

A secret undertaking that had been under way since the humans had arrived came to an end before Anthony's very eyes, and yet the Novacadians showed no fear when the astronauts, wielding machine guns, barged into the room and collected the people two and three at a time.

They showed no fear when the astronauts chained their legs and arms together, poked the butts of their guns into their backs, picked them up like furniture, and dragged them out into the light of day. Sometimes they dragged them by the hair.

And there was no screaming. Not even in their minds. What Anthony heard within his own mind at that point was an endless string of conversations. "Remember what you've seen today." "Protect Eve." "There is love between you; don't forget it."

When his peers saw him, a voice, stronger than all the others, resonated in his mind: "Save yourself trouble; tell them you had just discovered us and were about to turn us in."

He searched for Eve through the crowd but could not see her. He said to his commanding officer, "We'll be able to speak with them yet."

He was not disciplined for abandoning his fellow officers. Instead, they told him to give a report at the next meeting and, of all things, they patted him on the back.

Back at camp, Anthony folded his uniform and got ready for bed. He heard a knock at his door. "Come in," he called.

It was Jackson. He nodded his head, closed the door behind him and sat down on the edge of the squeaky bed. "Hey, Jackson," Anthony said. He felt tired and ached all over. If he were back on Earth, he'd make the first appointment he could with his occasional masseuse, Candy.

"So what happened today?" Jackson asked, jiggling his knees up and down. Anthony dropped the folded shirt on top of the pile and looked at his peer.

"I wanted to go sight-seeing," he lied. "Interest took me to the caves, and I decided to go in."

"So why didn't you immediately call the general or one of us?"

Anthony sighed. "They're so peaceful. It's not like they were going to attack me or do anything horrible."

Jackson pointed to his chest. "Come on, Harding," he said. "It's me. You can tell me what really happened. I know you didn't just happen to stumble upon their secret hiding place on one of your first days--the chances of that happening are minimal. So what really happened?"

He sighed again. "Part of why we came here was to blend in with the natives, right?" Anthony said. "Go under-cover?"

"Yeah."

Anthony stared him straight in the eyeballs. "That's not what happened. In all truthfulness, I didn't intend to turn them in."

Jackson held his hands up. "Well, you'd better not say that at the meeting. They'd have your hide, not to mention probably send you back home."

Anthony sat down next to Jackson. "It's just that, I mean, what have they done to us? Besides not speaking? Where I grew up, that wasn't so much a crime."

"The government, though, does. They see it as a threat."

"That's something that I don't understand."

"They're just taking precautions with these people while we determine if they're dangerous or not."

"But," Anthony said, exasperated, "they're not. What if I know that they're not? What if what we're doing to them is harming them in ways that we never thought it would?"

"Like?"

"I don't know, don't you think that imprisoning people, even if they're aliens, is cruel? And the experiments, haven't some of them died? And what about the force we use to contain them?"

"Whoa," Jackson said. "We only use force when they act up, and besides, you yourself heard that some of the astronauts turned up missing and are probably dead. And the experiments that they do are only ones that have been tested out on humans ahead of time."

"But what if it's different to these aliens?" Anthony said.

"Like how?"

"They don't talk," Anthony said. "Inserting communication chips in them could be harmful."

"It's all been well tested," Jackson said. "I don't see how it could be harmful."

Anthony gave up. He looked out the window into a twilight in which stars abounded. Thinking of Eve, he said, "Maybe you're right. Maybe I'm just crazy."

"What did you see there?" Jackson asked.

He looked back at his peer. "They were dancing," he said. "They looked like they were having the most fun in their lives." That gave him an idea. He stuck his pointer finger in the air. "Dancing!"

"You okay, buddy?" Jackson asked.

"Dancing is a social activity, right?" he said.

"Yeah."

"And, if you look at it a certain way, it can also be a form of communication, right?"

"Now I see what you're getting at. Are you going to talk about it at the meeting?"

"I sure am."

Jackson bent his head down and left the room, and with a new spark of excitement, Anthony lay back against his stiff pillow and kept his eyes open for several minutes, devising his plan. Not even the reality of Eve's recapture could squelch the optimism he now felt about the project to commune with Novacadia.

She opened her eyes weakly to a dim, dusty room. Pale light beamed in through the hastily nailed-up boards on the windows, which had been put there by the astronauts, the light catching particles of dust which floated and sparkled in the dank air. She could hear the sounds of land vehicles speeding by outside, gentle winds rocking the sturdy walls of the hut, and the heavy, raspy breathing of several people sleeping in the room.

She tried to lift her head, but could not, because she was chained down to her bed. Her head, hands and feet were cuffed in place by thick metal bands and when she spit into the air, she saw the sizzle of the force field around her.

She knew that her papa was in the room. She could sense him. *Papa?* No answer. A deeply sickening feeling engulfed her. What had happened while she was gone?

I should not have left. Not while my family was so vulnerable. But they had insisted that she do so, believing with such utter faith that she was the one who would at some point free them.

She was in her own hut, the hut that she had lived in with her family since her youth; that she knew. The breathing...were they those of her brothers and sisters?

She closed her eyes, focusing her mind. Even though she knew it was probably impossible, she made the attempt anyway. *Nela, can you hear me? Lir? Benjamen?*

She held her breath while she waited, and jumped when she heard someone stir. Towards the end, only her father had been

able to communicate with her, for the willpowers and the psychic bonds between her and her brothers and sisters were younger and much weaker--they had diminished long ago, destroyed by the vibrations of greed and hatred that were being sent off by the humans. But nevertheless, her heart jumped when she heard someone stand up out of bed.

A dark figure leaned over her. Her breathing quickened.

Lir? Ben?

In a voice that sounded neither Novacadian nor human, she heard, "Eve, you look terrible. You should not have let the humans catch you. You know, you have to be careful when you run away."

She lurched upwards but was caught by the restraints. Her eyes felt sore, as though they had been blackened, and she was certain that she had bruises all over her body.

When the person turned, she could see his face. It was Autumn, her oldest brother. *Autumn!*

But why could he now hear her voice? And why did he sound so strange?

With a few gestures, he leaned down and deactivated the force field, then gingerly released her from the metal restraints. She opened and closed her sore hands, then with his help, she sat up, eyes open and alert.

When she looked around the dim room, she saw the outlines of the rest of her family sleeping on their beds. *How did you release me? Surely it was the humans who restrained me.*

"I used my mind energy to release you, Eve. And soon, I'm going to do the same to release everyone."

Autumn, that's too dangerous. You can't release everyone...you know that, she said calmly.

"There are enough of us, Eve. We can overpower the humans, if we combine our energies."

What do you plan to do? Kill them all?

"If it will save us from their tortures, then yes."

So Autumn had succumbed to the hatred. His mind, now bursting with power, was high on the negativity that he had been picking up from the humans. It was only a matter of time either before he was killed by the force of the humans or of the hatred that would weaken and kill him like the illness that it was.

And Papa...where is he? Is he alright? Eve hugged her sheets protectively around her, feeling sickened and frightened--not of her brother so much as for him.

"He is asleep. He will be with you shortly. Just take it easy now. Gather up your strength for later."

CHAPTER TEN

But she could not sleep. When her older brother left, she timidly got out of bed and looked at the faces of her family who were sleeping--Lir, Nela, Benjamen, and her papa. Their faces were dirty and worn-looking, as though they were sick.

With tears in her throat, she kneeled down before her papa and said, "Even if they capture you they will not have you forever, because they will not have me."

It was at that moment that she began to hear the whisperings--at first like someone crumpling a piece of paper, then growing in clarity.

She grabbed her heart and stood. Was it the whisperings of her people?

She closed her eyes and staggered backwards, feeling like she was going to faint when she realized what it really was--it was the whisperings of the humans!

She caught only a few words here and there, like *kill*, *dangerous*, and *painful*. She pressed her tiny, white fingers to her temples and moaned silently. It was the vibrations of the hatred, now coming to try and claim her.

No! She would not let this seduction take hold of her. She realized, suddenly, that it was now happening because she was in such close proximity to those that she loved--those that she loved who had already succumbed to it.

It would have been so easy for her, in that moment, to cry out passionately her desire for revenge against the astronauts for taking her family, but she stopped herself. She would only be letting the evil defeat her, as well. And God willing, she knew that she was the one who would save them all.

The whisperings continued. She felt two tears drop from her eyes as she looked through pain at her family. She wanted desperately to save them from the sickness that had grabbed hold

of their hearts, but she also knew that she did not yet have the strength to do so. The prophecies stated it best: she would likely have to die in order to truly rescue them.

She kissed her papa's forehead, and his skin felt damp and cold. She closed her eyes again and got up, walking to the other side of the room. "I will never let you win," she said.

As quickly as they came, the voices vanished. As she looked out the window, she could see Arista rising up from the horizon, brilliantly orange and the clouds surrounding it pink and purple. The gray cumulus clouds in the sky higher up were moving swiftly with the wind, and among them and almost camouflaged by them Eve could see a hovercraft descending towards the planet.

Someone stirred. "...Eve?" It was Lir, the older of her two sisters.

"Go back to bed, Lir."

"You're back. Are you hurt?"

She turned to face her sister. "They captured the people in the cave. I was among them when it happened."

"Oh, no! All of them?"

"Don't worry about it now, Lir." Lir, wearing a dressing gown, rose and crossed the room. She then touched Eve on the arm. Eve looked up at her.

"I have not succumbed, Eve," she said.

Eve nodded at her, then feeling gratitude that could not be measured by the deepest seas in the universe. "Then you're the only one in our family."

At camp, Anthony was washing his hands when he overheard General Garrison talking with Kingston Smyth.

"I've put that Novacadian, the one that ran away, back in her house, but she's shackled to her bed. Hopefully we'll get no more trouble out of that one."

"Um, sir," Anthony interrupted. "Don't you think that's a little harsh? You've already got the force fields, and plenty of armed men manning the village."

The general swiveled his eyes to Anthony. "Harding, don't you remember that one of them recently found a way to break the force fields? You were even there. It took seven men to hold him down."

"But we've made updates to the system since then. We found the problem and fixed it. With all due respect, sir,"

General Garrison raised his eyes to him. "...Yes?"

"Part of our mission in coming here was to pose as allies to the Novacadians, and I don't see how shackling them to their beds will make them trust us anymore."

The general nodded. "I see what you're saying. So you want us to release her from her restraints, is that it?"

"Well, at least get someone to do it that they trust."

"Like you?"

"Well, they did let me into their cave. To me that seems like a pretty big show of trust. And if I release her, they'll trust me even more."

"Very well. You can release the girl. But if she gives us even the slightest problem, I want her in a holding cell."

"I'm on it, sir."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

In the light of all three suns shining down upon Communion, a few gangly Novacadians were strolling slowly along the man-paved streets and the dusty dirt roads. Anthony rode into town on the back of a large land vehicle holding a half dozen armed men. When the vehicle came to an abrupt stop, he hopped off.

"Just be careful with that one," one of his peers said. "That whole family has caused trouble for us."

He nodded and started walking towards the hut where Eve's family lived.

The doors and windows were all closed. Even though it was daytime, the force fields on this house were still activated. Anthony asked the astronaut standing guard to deactivate it.

"If you need help, call for me," the man said.

Anthony was unarmed. As soon as the force fields were deactivated, he lowered his head and walked inside to a cool, dark interior.

It was tomblike, he noticed, with little light coming through and having the atmosphere of thick silence. He looked around at the room he had stepped into, and took note of the strange decor: the walls were bare except for some drying herbs

which had been strung up loosely by some threads, and the floors were made of compressed dirt. The table in the center of the room was made of very dark wood, surrounded by what looked like stumps. There was little about the room, besides the table, that resembled what a human might use. The Novacadians needed no fireplace to cook their food, and there was no running water. He remembered that they required little fluids. There were no decorations in the place except for a tapestry made out of dyed fern leaves, which was hung up on the far wall.

He walked further into the hut, searching for the room where Eve was supposed to be.

When he approached the door, the force field flickered off and he then entered. Eve was inside, sitting on her bed. She lurched backwards.

"It's only me," he said.

She wasn't in her restraints. He came closer to her, shaking his head. "It's alright. It's only me."

Recognition flashed in her eyes. "Oh, thank God," she said. Slowly, she stood up from the bed onto shaky legs. She walked over to Anthony and grasped his hands. "I was hoping that you would come."

He looked down at her. "How did you get free of your restraints? You are lucky that I was the first one who saw you."

"It was my brother," she said. Her eyes widened. "Anthony, you have to watch out for my older brother, Autumn."

He is very dangerous right now. I fear that he is the next one who is going to retaliate."

Anthony looked at her with concern. "Will he succeed?"

Her voice was quiet. "He might succeed in killing someone, but he won't succeed at freeing us, like he says he will."

The feel of her hands in his was familiar and soothing. As he stood with her, looking down into her eyes, into her inquisitive face, he felt absolute trust that he had not felt since Kate's death. "Why do you want to help me? I thought that humans were the enemy."

"Hatred is the enemy, Anthony. Humans are only the vessel that carries it. If a human dies at the hand of it, it is the same as if a Novacadian does. I could not live with it if I could have put a stop to it."

"Even though we are imprisoning you?"

"Anthony," she said. "You are unique. I don't know how and I don't know why, but I know that you are not willingly a part of it."

"But I am a part of it, then."

She turned her head away. "I sense hatred in you, Anthony."

He then felt disappointment surging through him. Wasn't he different from the others, considering that he could hear the Novacadians' voices?

"It's in all of mankind, Anthony. It's human nature."

He knew it was the truth. "But how is it that a race that has already been saved by a messiah can have hatred, while a race that has not yet ushered in a messiah can be pure? It doesn't make sense to me."

"We are not pure," she said. "We are vulnerable to outside influences. Your race has the power to choose between sin and righteousness, but our race has not been given that chance yet. We are left to the forces that may claim us."

"So in other words, you are different."

"Yes, we are."

Anthony always thought of himself as a good person. He shuddered at the thought that there might be hatred within him, and he wondered where it came from. He realized, then, that that was the one difference that separated him most from Eve, even though he was beginning to think that there were more similarities than the humans ever could have dreamed. But there was one thought that he could not get away from: he feared, deep down in his heart, that he was falling in love with her.

General Garrison was tired of making the trek back and forth from the airbase to the surface. But necessity required him to be both places at different times, and at this time, he was needed in space. Some of his technicians had detected an anomaly in the upper atmosphere, and they wanted him to be there when they checked it out.

It was probably just a false reading on the part of the robot they'd sent out, but nevertheless, it was worth taking a look at.

"We've lost three probes so far, sir," a technician said, who was looking at a picture of the area on his monitor.

"They've just vanished into thin air."

"What do you think it is?"

"Well, it looks like an intense electrical storm, but we can't say for certain. Whenever one of our probes gets too close, something happens and all the visuals get shut off, then we lose it for good. When we sent the robot, it just turned around."

"Could it be an electrical storm if it's lasted for days?"

"Probably not, sir. We're trying to get to the bottom of it."

"Keep an eye on it. Has it been moving?"

"Slowly. But it hasn't touched down onto the surface."

"Keep an eye on it," he repeated. "If it's a storm, then we can warn the people below before it happens."

"Yes, sir."

The sky was overcast in the town of Communion. The weather: dark, gray, seemed to mirror the mood that was permeating the natives. As they shuffled along the lonely, dusty streets from building to building, they looked unusually depressed and worn. But there was also an air of tension that was unmistakable. Like an impending thunderstorm, there was an

electricity that brought intrigue, but also fear, into Anthony's imagination.

He feared, not only for the welfare of the peaceful residents, but also for what might lay ahead for them: what Eve had talked about--submission to hatred and violent retaliation. And this retaliation, he knew, would end in death; not only the lives of human astronauts, but also the lives of Novacadians.

As he was driving past Communion in the back of a large land vehicle on the way back to camp, he could not help but feel sorrow as he looked at the forlorn faces of the natives. No doubt part of their depression was a result of Eve's recapture. For how long, he didn't know, they had been putting their faith in this one person to be the answer to all of their prayers. To save them from the humans? Or to save them from the humans' sinful hearts?

The book was still open, as far as Anthony was concerned, as to whether or not he believed any of it. What he was certain of was that these people were so certain. Not even the world of Jesus' time could claim the universal acceptance that Eve had gained. In that way, Earth and Novacadia were different.

As they rolled away from the town, distance steadily growing between them and the scattered landscape of thatched huts that looked like mushrooms on a meadow from a distance, Anthony shivered when he thought of Eve.

It was true; he had never met another person which such fire in her eyes, with such dignity in her presence, with such

quiet courage. There was something about Eve that set her apart from every human and every alien that Anthony had ever known.

When they got to camp, a man in fatigues was there to greet him and his peers. "We can show you the experiments, now," the man said. Anthony had been waiting for this moment almost since before they had touched down on the planet. Exactly how far did their cruelty--if it was cruelty--extend?

Jackson and Smyth joined them just before they went into the large building--a makeshift IAST headquarters built by astronauts--that was hidden behind some rocky cliffs South of where the tents were set up. Once they were all inside, a scientist led them to the main laboratory.

"All our anatomy research is done in here," the scientist said.

Anthony had to stifle a wretch. A corpse that didn't look at all like a corpse was lying on the table. Its skin was a shimmering pale blue, like mother-of-pearl, and its face was perfect and doll-shaped. But if nothing else, the dead Novacadian looked like he was in utter peace. He looked around. Three other bodies were in body bags, waiting to be given autopsies. In a weak voice, Anthony managed, "Did you...kill these people?"

The scientist, Dr. Edward Grant, gave him a glance. "Personally, no. They all have their own stories."

"But, I mean," he said, still feeling sick, "Were they killed solely for the purpose of scientific research?"

"Of course not," the man said. "Those two right there," he said, pointing to two of the bodies on the other side of the room, "died when they almost snapped Lieutenant Waller's neck. We wouldn't have killed them otherwise. That would have been unethical use of force."

Anthony paused. "Don't you think it's unethical to be performing autopsies on them if we don't know what their practices or beliefs are concerning death?"

Edward Grant pointed to him with his latex-gloved hands. "How would we know if we can't communicate with them? These scientific experiments are going to make all that possible. And with these autopsies, our research is going to be a lot swifter."

"But you also need live Novacadians," Anthony said.

"Of course," Edward Grant said. "You can't do everything on a cadaver. For instance, we would never know if the communication chips are working if we hooked it up to a dead alien. We need both--the live and the dead specimen." Snapping off his powdery gloves, he said, "Come this way and I'll show you what we're doing with the live specimens." He then led them down a small, dark hall that led all the way across to the other side of the building.

Entering through a thick metal door, the air inside was chill and damp. Anthony's first reaction was that it looked like an execution chamber. In the corner, a scared-looking Novacadian was strapped down onto a stretcher and various wires and gadgets were coming out of his head. A laboratory

technician was typing into a console while another one was fiddling with the gadgets.

"As you see here, the subject is conscious while we make adjustments to his communication chip."

The Novacadian's almond-shaped eyes drifted to Anthony. "That seems cruel to me. Can't you tell that he doesn't like that, just by the expression on his face?"

The scientist was quick to answer. "You're thinking in human terms. Quite possibly, these aliens have entirely different expressions for different emotions, and for that matter, an entirely different set of emotions. We have psychologists working on the problem."

Anthony was almost at the point where he couldn't bear to watch it anymore. Quietly, he said, "I don't think any person, nomatter if they are human or not, deserves to be treated in this way: imprisoned in their homes at night, experimented on during the day. We're not even giving them the right to live the way they did before we got here. They've been nothing but peaceful, except for a couple of exceptions, and something--" he wavered, "--tells me, humans may be at fault for that."

Again, the scientist was quick to answer. "But you've got to understand, Private Harding, it's a scientific finding. If not for preserving the entirety of humanity, if not for communing with extra-terrestrials for the first time ever, then by God, we've got to do this for the sake of Science."

Anthony's questions were answered. As far as he was concerned, the experimentations on the Novacadians, even if they

had been tested on humans ahead of time, were cruel and unnecessary. No wonder they believed they needed a savior.

CHAPTER TWELVE

In the airbase, the technicians were working twelve- and eighteen- hour shifts to try and get to the bottom of the strange storm-like mass that was hovering in Novacadia's upper atmosphere.

Not only was it growing, but apparently it was acting like a vacuum, sucking up pockets of hydrogen by the galleon.

General Garrison, who preferred to stay in the luxurious, albeit artificial setting of the base, was particularly concerned about it.

"If this baby touches ground, there's no telling what it can do," he said, talking over the shoulder of a technician who was tracking the temperature changes around the strange anomaly. They couldn't get inside the thing, they soon learned, but they could get as close as possible.

"It's puzzling," the technician said, steadily eying his console. "It's acting like it's a black hole, the way it's sucking in gases without spitting anything back out, but I've never seen anything like it before."

The assumption was, of course, that it was a storm. But truth be told, everyone knew that that wasn't true. By eyeball, it looked like a storm and it moved like a storm, but nothing else about it indicated that that was what it was.

Unfortunately, they couldn't even get close enough to it to see anything more than a dark, swirling mass moving slowly across the sky. Was it solid? Was it gaseous? Was it living? Long, steady periods of no answers only led to more questions, and more concern from General Garrison.

"Send another probe in," he ordered. "But this time, I want you to bring it back before it gets too close."

"Right away, sir."

General Garrison reflected that the biggest concern was the possibility of touchdown. If it had been an electrical storm, even, then provisions could be made in defense. But the way things looked, that wasn't likely. If this was some inner-atmosphere black hole, then the planet and the people below would be defenseless against the result.

He went to his quarters, lit a pipe, and stared out the window at the myriad of twinkling stars. To an untrained eye, he mused, one might mistake it for the skyline of Earth.

The project to commune with and observe the behavior up-close of the Novacadians began the following morning. Anthony could barely get out of bed when his commanding officer yelled out his name and told him to get showered. His eyes were crusty with night-sand and he'd been tossing and turning with strange dreams that had no endings. Like the one about piloting a space shuttle and getting lost in outer space, and suddenly Eve appearing out of nowhere, directing him to safety. Or like the one about the meteor falling to the planet, only before hitting,

breaking into a million tiny pieces and showering the ground with dust.

He sat up on his cot, opened his arms and yawned. The light outside was amber-yellow, one of those dawns you could only find here under the alternating lights of Jemiah, Arista, and Focal. He shuffled to the bathroom to get washed up, and on his way there he noticed through the window something small and dark that looked like a thundercloud in the sky. He shaded his eyes and looked up at it. It was the one aberration in the otherwise perfect sky. The amber-yellow was streaked with pink and lavender clouds, and Focal was just beginning to rise from the rocky horizon in the East. He shrugged, guessing it was probably just some rain cloud, after all, and continued towards the bathroom.

On his way out he ran into Tony Peterson. "Ready for the big day?" he asked.

Anthony shrugged. "If it will bring us closer to more peaceful relations with the Novacadians, then I'm willing to do anything."

"They seem to trust you, even more so than anyone else. I'm anxious to observe how they'll react to you when we spend time with them today." He put his fingers to his lips thoughtfully. "I find it interesting that when you discovered them in the caves, they were dancing. That's worlds more than observed from them in Communion."

"Is it any wonder?" Anthony said. "They're prisoners. Dancing is a means to rejoice. What reason have they to rejoice right now?"

Anthony recalled the meeting that had taken place the previous night in regards to their mission. When Anthony had brought up mention of the Novacadians' dancing, and what that might mean to their research, his superiors had met him with agreement. What he'd proposed was that they should concentrate their efforts on body movements, because the dancing in the caves was the closest anyone had ever gotten to communicating with them.

Of course, Anthony knew that wasn't true; he could hear their voices. But he didn't mention it for two reasons: one, he knew that Eve was right; he would only be heaping a load of trouble upon himself. But two, he now had a feeling that it would only harm, not help, the Novacadians. Directing the astronauts' research to body language, he felt, might help distract them. Not only that, but he could also spend some time with Eve and get more information out of her.

After he was in a fresh set of fatigues and had shaven for the day, Anthony hopped onto the back of a land vehicle to be driven back into Communion.

He was not taken immediately to Eve's hut. Instead, he was brought to a tiny one with a roof that was caving in and walls that looked like they were collapsing. It was covered by a green fungus so thick it could easily have been mistaken for ivy.

"This way, boys. Those of you who have weapons, leave them at the door."

They opened the moldy, half-rotted door and it almost fell off the hinges in so doing. The smell greeted them almost immediately. Sulphur.

Whoever lives here must have been found in the caves, Anthony thought.

The floor was muddy from where the rain had come through the holes in the roof. No doubt this hut had been neglected for years until the inhabitants were brought back from the caves by the astronauts.

"Two sisters live here. Apparently they are very old. We thought this might be a good starting place for you, since they are virtually bed-ridden and are unlikely to become hostile."

Anthony peeked his head around the door to the bedroom. Two gangly, decrepit heaps of pale flesh were sleeping on either side of the room. Standing there, looking down on them, he was suddenly overwhelmed with such a sense of pure love and familiarity that he almost doubled over.

He *knew* these women! And yet he had never met them...maybe briefly, in the caves, but in no other, more personal way.

A hand rested on his shoulder. Johnson spoke into his ear. "Let's set up our mattresses and move in, shall we?"

Anthony tore himself away from the doorway. They proceeded to clear out a section of the front room, lay down their beds, and bring in their belongings and equipment.

After they had finished, they got a call from General Garrison. Flipping up the portable, they saw his stern face through the radio waves. "Andrews and Peterson," he barked, "You've been debriefed about this expedition many times. You're the most qualified members of the team to assess the Novacadians psychologically. We have Harding along with you because of their apparent affinity for him. Take advantage and take that into account as you make your observations and take notes. Johnson and Smyth," he said, referring to the two medical doctors, "Do your magic and keep your eyes peeled. I expect that, as a group, you'll have something of interest by the end of the week."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

They broke for lunch. Anthony was peeling a banana when he heard a soft rustling coming from the bedroom. He broke away from the group to investigate the noise. Peering into the room, he saw that the light was now distilled and particles of dust were floating in the air. One of the two sisters' eyes were open. "What is your name?" he whispered quietly.

Speak with your mind, she said. He felt his heart leap in anticipation. He edged closer to her.

"Come and sit on the bed," she said noiselessly. "It's alright."

Hesitantly, he came closer, then sat down gingerly on the edge of the bed. He shook his head from side to side. "I

can't," he whispered. "I'm not like you. I'm a human. I speak with my voice."

She was old; that was for certain. How old, Anthony couldn't tell. Her pale skin was crinkled and whiter than most of the others, as though it had been bleached. Her hair was thin, showing patches of pink skull in stripes.

"Try," she said.

"How old are you?" he whispered.

"Speak with your mind, Anthony. I know you can do it. Humans have the capacity for such communication. You have it in you, you just have to turn it on, like choosing to raise your right arm."

He squeezed his eyelids shut, focusing his mind. He thought, *Tell me how old you are.*

A silence then stretched out for many long moments. The old woman raised a feeble hand to her mouth. "I'm four-hundred and seventy-two Earth years."

Anthony gasped. She had read his mind! It was beyond anything he could conceive. "How can you be so old?" he said out loud.

"In your mind, Anthony. Remember that."

He closed his eyes again. She said, "You don't need to do that. It doesn't take intense concentration to perform mental telepathy."

He opened his eyes; and instead focused his eyes on the bed across the room which still held another sleeping figure. "Tell me how you got to be so old," he thought.

She scrunched up her face into a weak smile. "Novacadians live much longer than humans," she explained. "In the older days, though, it was different."

"How so?" he thought.

"We did not live as long. No one knows why, it just was. And there were more of us, too. No one knows why our numbers have diminished, either. Part of it has to do with the climate, we think."

Anthony felt flushed from the sensation of being able to talk to someone just with his mind. It was so freeing, so invigorating, like rushing through the air at blinding speeds. It was like he was always meant to do this. "Tell me, what is your name?"

"Sarah," she said. "I am one of the oldest ones here. They say I am a prophet. On Novacadia, people treat their elders with respect. They see us as bearers of wisdom."

He realized that this must be one of the prophets that had said that Eve was the messiah--destined to die a horrible death in order to free the Novacadian race.

She had read his mind. "You think of Eve," she said. She sat up a little bit in her bed. "She is very special to us, Anthony. I hope you don't think that we are feeding her to the lions."

He *had* thought that, but out of respect, he didn't say it.

"I know you're skeptical, Anthony. But it's our religion, not yours. And when time comes for the prophecy to come to

pass, you may find that there's not anything that anyone could have done to stop it."

"But *I* can stop it," Anthony said. He opened his palms. "Surely there's another way that your people can be freed. Our research will not last forever, and sooner or later the humans and the Novacadians will be communicating with each other just as we are communicating right now."

"It's not simply a matter of our physical imprisonment," she said, looking at him with large, pale eyes. "We fight a Spiritual battle, one that cannot be solved simply if we are able to telepath with your fellows."

He said, "Tell me, when we speak to each other in our minds like this, can you read all of my thoughts? Do you know everything that I am thinking right now? Or do I have some privacy?"

She placed a pale hand on his knee. "Nothing I see or hear is not given to me by God. He doesn't reveal everything to me, and so there are parts of you that I do not know. But I sense things about you, deep within you. Like right now, I sense great concern for Eve, but also love. She told you that that was how you were able to hear our voices, did she not?"

He nodded his head, feeling with even more certainty that it was true. "So why wouldn't it help for you to be able to speak with the rest of us?" he asked. "You could tell them why those men disappeared, and you could tell them that you have no intention of harming anyone in the future. They might release you from your homes and stop torturing and killing you."

"But our love for them, the love necessary to make a connection, might leave us vulnerable to their vibrations of hatred. And this hatred can be very seductive. About half of us in the town have already fallen victim to it."

Anthony gave her a serious look. He said softly, "Eve told me that there was hatred in me. Is that true?"

She looked at him sadly. "You are a human. You have the nature of a human being. But you are different from the others; yours is hidden deep down inside--and Anthony, yours is justified."

The power of that statement hit him as though it were a lightning bolt. So he was different, then. But even so, when had he ever had hatred or felt hatred for anyone? He couldn't remember a single time. Sure, he wasn't the best Catholic in the world, but he thought of himself as basically a good guy. But hatred--even justified hatred--when had that ever happened?

But he couldn't get the sense that he had known this woman for a long time out of his head. She had known his name even before he spoke it, and it was as though she knew him intimately, not just right now, but in the past.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Eve was watching her papa. He was struggling with the two opposing forces. He was weak, and vulnerable, and ready to fall off the fence in either direction. Eve was close to tears as

she watched him toss and turn in his bed feverishly, his eyelids fluttering with, no doubt, terrible dreams.

They were the only ones in the room. Her brothers and sisters had risen and left a couple of hours ago to be out in the daylight.

She was deeply upset that her papa might be the next victim of this malicious human sickness, but as she reminded herself, she couldn't let it take her down, as well. After all, humans weren't the real enemy. It was their nature, something that had been a part of their existences for thousands of years. It would be easy to blame them for taking her papa's life, not to mention the rest of her family, and vow revenge, but she must not let that happen. She must stay firm and true in her love for her papa, but not let selfish ambition betray her.

She looked up at the sunrays coming in through the window. She felt her heart jolt when she thought suddenly of Autumn. He, on the other hand, was no longer struggling. Unknowingly, he had lost his battle and would soon lose his life. But who, Eve thought, would he take down with him? She felt saddened by the loss of her brother and fearful for what may lay ahead.

Lir, too, was vengeful. She could only thank God that Benjamin and Nela were still untouched.

A shivering in the ferns outside echoed the excitement that was building among the townspeople. Something was about to happen, and the men and women knew it. Eve, on the other hand, knew what it was. Autumn.

Something strange happened at the airbase just hours after they sent the latest probe. It returned to them, intact, as though it had started on its course, stopped, then turned right back around to come back.

It puzzled General Garrison. "Didn't you tell it to go close to the anomaly?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. We ordered it on a course 300 knots from the center of the storm."

They were calling it "the storm" now, for lack of a better term.

"Well, did you goof up on the programming? Did the probe, somehow, malfunction?"

"No, sir. We checked the log three times, and our calculations were right on course. As for the probe itself, well, you can take a look at it, it's in the observation room. Our technicians have found no malfunctions or abnormalities."

Suddenly they were interrupted by a young technician with wavy blond hair. "Sir, you better come look at this."

Garrison grumbled. If this was yet another person who didn't know how to do his job, he was about ready to quit his own job.

But when he was face-to-face looking at it, he could scarcely believe what he was seeing. On the screen was the very same probe they claimed was sitting in the observation room, only it was sailing directly towards the mouth of the storm.

"My God, how can that be?" He got up and rushed to the room where the probe was supposed to be. The young technician

followed him. "Sir, we lost it when the signal went off. We just rediscovered its location, and apparently, it's gotten closer to the storm than we had hoped."

The general pushed his way through several people and barged through the door.

There it was. Fully intact, glittering with lights, it was the probe.

He pulled up the picture of the same probe on the nearest console. Before his very eyes, he saw both duplicates at the exact same time.

"General Garrison..."

"Not now."

He rubbed his forehead, not even knowing where to begin to try and find an explanation for this.

"General Garrison, the reason why the probe has gotten closer to the storm than we had hoped is because the storm is sucking it up."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Eve was struggling within herself about the loss of her brother--the man she had grown up with and loved for many years. It was so unfair for this to happen, so suddenly, so roughly, and without warning. She paced the darkened room, searching for answers, but finding little.

He was a good man. He was faithful, and loving, and hard-working, and honest--about the best brother she could have ever

hoped for. In her mind, it was senseless that he be taken away at such a young age, when it would have been likely that he live to see six centuries pass.

Her love for him would never stop, she knew that now. No matter how hateful or vengeful he became at the end, she vowed she would always see the good in him. Above all the qualities that were most distinctive in him, bravery was the most exceptional. But she knew that this would be his demise.

Novacadians were not pure; they were vulnerable to forces of good and to evil--that had already been decided. But were they at fault?

Yes. All the prophets and all the elders combined did not know the origins of the species, but one clue remained: One of the prophets had said that one day, during a period of widespread peace, temptation would come to their doorstep, awakening old hungers and desires that had been dormant for centuries.

A long time ago, Novacadians were tempted with the primal urges of lust, hatred, and envy. No one knew when, or how. But through the years, the people of Novacadia evolved into a race of Love and Peace, leaving behind all their selfish drives. The only problem was that they were still deep inside of them, ready to reignite in full force, like the flip of a switch. All it needed was for someone to turn them on.

Autumn didn't deserve to die. If only he could hold on just a little bit longer, just until the prophecies came to pass, then maybe he would be saved. But Eve knew that he

wouldn't. The sickness had blackened his heart and twisted around it like thorns.

Something is coming, Eve. She looked to the window, sucking in a breath. She recognized the voice as the elder of the two sisters, Sarah.

"I know," she said. "My brother has fallen victim to the humans."

No, Eve. Something else. It is coming from the sky and it will change the planet and our race forever.

She nodded her head. "Then I am ready for it."

Outside, the skies rumbled with thunder. Anthony was sitting in the living room of the hut, going over the notes that they had made since they had moved in. There weren't many, since the rest of the team had had little interactions with the two sisters, but enough of them so as to make some progress.

The younger sister, who was named Rebecca, came out of the bedroom on wobbly knees and frail, bare legs. "Anthony, something is about to happen to your men."

He looked up at her, and remembering to use the mental telepathy he had just learned, thought, "What's going to happen?"

She braced herself against the frame of the door. "A brother of your Eve is about to snap. You will not be harmed. But others will be."

Anthony looked to the others who were slumbering on their mats. "Is there anything we can do to stop it?"

"No," she said. "Once a Novacadian has been bitten by the illness, there is nothing that anyone can do. I don't know where or how he will retaliate, but he will--and others will probably follow."

Gentle rain began to pour down, tapping at the walls of the hut--no doubt the leak before the deluge. Water began dripping down into the hut from the holes in the ceiling, and a big drop fell on top of Anthony's head.

"When?" Anthony asked.

"Soon," she said. "Tomorrow."

"Will Eve be alright?"

She shook her head. "Eve will never fall victim to the plague. She is our messiah. She will hold firm."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The thunderstorm came, and with it the streets became muddy rivers that overflowed into the huts. At night, Anthony and his team evacuated from their floor-beds and headed back to camp until the water receded.

As they were driving, lightning crashed, striking the rocky cliff to their left. Pebbles and boulders fell at precisely the moment they had just passed, blocking the road.

"Quite a storm, eh?" his captain remarked.

It was the only way out of Communion besides scaling the mountains or finding your way through the North Forest.

"Ah, don't worry about it," he said. "My men will find some way of keeping dry. And those Novacadians won't try anything funny in this weather."

Anthony had a shivering feeling, remembering what Rebecca had told him about Eve's brother. Someone was going to die, and Heaven knew what the repercussions would be. And it was going to happen tomorrow.

Anthony had an advantage on the others in the IAST. He, unlike the others, knew that the Novacadians were not at fault for what was going on. They were innocent. But try telling your teammates that you know what's been going on because you've been using mental telepathy to speak with them. The reception would be less than grateful.

They drove up to the entrance to the camp and got out underneath fat drops of rain and into muddy pools of water. As time became closer and closer to tomorrow, the more uneasy he felt.

Eve had warned him about Autumn. He'd gotten the sense, too, that this was a very powerful man, capable of creating widespread harm. And if that were to happen, he knew, then the astronauts might take even more drastic measures to control them.

He made up his mind and decided to go directly to the head honcho--General Garrison. But when he peeked his head into his quarters, he was not there.

He wandered the camp under the black sky and steady flow of rain when he came upon a lighted tent. Several senior

officers were sitting around a table, conducting a meeting. Out of curiosity, Anthony tilted his head to listen.

"...Of course, our ultimate goal is to soon be able to inhabit the planet. Finding another planet like this is a one-in-a-million shot, and we don't have the time, nor the resources to do it. Novacadia is it. Communing with aliens is all very well and good, but ultimately, that's just for show-and-tell. My opinion? If the Novacadians continue to be a major threat to humans, we wipe them out. Completely. Earth goals come first, and with our rapidly heating planet, and nowhere to go, we're all going to die if we don't, at some point, set up colonies here. These aliens are dangerous, and should be treated like ferocious animals. But there are few of them, and even though we've already lost men at their hands, we can get rid of them quickly. Probably we would have lost more if we hadn't of confined them to their homes. I suggest more drastic measures. As far as anyone can see, we have next to no hope of communicating with them, and if they break force fields and kill people at random, then sooner or later they're going to have to go."

Anthony's eyes opened wide. They were planning to *kill* them all? He shuddered at the thought. But there was a reason for why the Novacadians were retaliating! Didn't anyone see, just with common sense, that they were imprisoning and torturing them? Or were they blind to their evils?

Even on Earth, there were laws about protecting endangered species. Apparently here, the same rules did not apply. He

saw, in his mind, Eve's inhumanly large, dark, almond-shaped eyes, her pleading eyes, reaching down into his soul. "Don't say anything," she told him. "It is not just for your safety, it is for ours, as well. What is about to happen is meant to happen. Be at peace with that."

He walked sadly back to his tent, getting sopping wet in the process, and then took off his wet garments and hung them over a clothes rack. He tried to speak with Eve again. He focused his mind, pictured her lovely face, but nothing came through. He felt dejected and disappointed. He had, in his power, the ability to tell his superiors that he had been communicating with the Novacadians, but Eve didn't want him to say anything. And to the core of his being, he trusted her.

But more powerful than his trust in her was his love for her. And he didn't want her to be killed. Not by the astronauts, not the way the prophets said she would, no. He wanted her to be alive and prospering and leading the way for diplomacy between humans and Novacadians. They could be saved, Anthony decided, as he fell asleep to the distant rumbling of thunder.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Brilliant daylight broke through the flimsy flaps of Anthony's tent. He bolted awake. Had it already happened? What time was it?

He jumped out of bed and saw astronauts in fatigues roaming the camp. He rubbed his eyes. Everyone looked normal--no excitement, no commotion.

He stopped a man who was walking by. "Has anything happened in Communion?" he asked.

The man turned. "Well, we had some men move the obstructions to the roadway this morning. We found nothing unusual; just some flooding."

That was all? Anthony felt a sickening feeling that he should not have slept so long. He threw on his clothes and washed up as fast as he could, then demanded to be taken into Communion as soon as possible.

"Eager to continue with the project, I see." But of course, that's not where he was headed.

The sky was clean and bright blue, devoid of any clouds. The breeze was cool and refreshing; it would have been one of those perfect mountain days in the last century on Earth. In the distance, the tree-dwellers cooed happily in the invigorating weather.

Anthony hopped off and immediately headed for Eve's hut. "But Anthony," someone called after him, "Your station is on the West side of town."

"I'm not going there," he answered. "I have to check on the Novacadian who escaped."

"Very well."

The Novacadians were strolling the streets peacefully, and even the front of Eve's hut looked quiet and undisturbed. As he

opened the door, he called out her name using telepathy. He found her sleeping in a back room.

"Eve." He touched her lightly. Even when she was asleep, she looked like an angel. If there were fear in her, her countenance revealed no sign of it. Her lips were pursed, slightly open, and she was sighing--a noise that was barely audible.

When he touched her shoulder, she opened her eyes.
"Anthony."

He smiled down at her. "You're alright," he said.
She made no sound.

"I was hoping that nothing would happen before I got here. I wanted to make sure that nothing happened to you."

She closed her eyes. "Nothing will happen to me, Anthony. Not until the proper time. You have no reason to worry."

"But what about Autumn?"

"It's true. He is near the breaking point."

"Today?"

"Yes."

Anthony felt the blood pumping through his veins. "I have to stop it."

"But you cannot."

"He will kill people, Eve, and he will take down Novacadians with him."

"There is nothing that can be done."

Their eyes met, then they both sadly looked away. "I have learned to speak in my mind, now, Eve."

"I see," she said.

"They had us move in with two old sisters--Sarah and Rebecca--and they taught me how."

Eve sat up. "You are hoping that somehow you can use this telepathy you have learned to try and communicate with the other humans, are you not?"

"Well, it's worth a try, don't you think? I am not a Novacadian, and so I am not vulnerable to their 'vibrations.'"

She rested her pale hand on top of his. "I doubt it will work, Anthony, but you can try."

A puzzled engineer approached General Garrison in the evening with some even more startling news.

He had been hesitating to say anything about it, since it was probably just an old probe that they had decided to bring back before getting it too close to the storm, but with the news of the duplicate probes, he promptly made the decision to call it to the general's attention.

"Sir?"

"Come in, of course."

The engineer, with thick glasses and a stooped posture, stood before the general's desk. "Well, what have you to say?" the general asked.

"Sir, I apologize for not reporting this sooner, but I think this may be of interest to you."

General Garrison leaned forward. "What is it now?"

From behind his back, the engineer pulled out the probe.
"Its code matches the one we sent out yesterday, but--"

"But?"

"It came back to the airbase two weeks ago."

Scientists and mathematicians worked steadily on the project. What they concluded was that the anomaly, the "storm," was actually some sort of inner-atmosphere time warp.

It was growing, they found. And the larger it grew, the further back in time it "warped" things, be it atmospheric gases, flying objects like probes, or whatever else got in its way. The rate of growth to the length of time warped was exponential. Meaning, the warp was going to send thing farther and farther back in time, at faster and faster rates. They now knew that this anomaly was indeed very dangerous, even though the scientists were excited. They'd never seen one before and were anxious to study it. But the fact remained: if they got too close, even though it apparently spit objects back out intact, they might end up somewhere in the Jurassic period on Novacadia--and who knew what that might be like.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Eve saw him enter as she was sitting with Anthony. Autumn breezed through the front door, calmly crossed the front room, then sat down.

"You'd better go," Eve said.

"I want to stay with you," Anthony said.

She shook her head. "Autumn hates humans. He will hate you."

Before he could protest, Eve pushed him against the far wall as they heard Autumn's footsteps approaching. Anthony's breath was quick and his heart was hammering. "Don't make a sound," she said.

"Eve," Autumn telepathed. "It's a lovely day outside. Wouldn't you like to enjoy it?"

She shook her head uneasily. "Autumn, you know that I am confined to my house. Because I ran away, they think I might try it again."

"It's foolishness," he said. "Foolishness! You took freedom so they won't give you freedom? The humans are savages, unrelenting and cruel at every turn. I can break you out of the house. I know how to disconnect the force fields, if you want. I know how to let you run away again, if you want. After all, you are the only one who can set us all free."

But it was too late for Autumn, and only Eve knew that. She shook her head. "That is not how it is supposed to happen. I don't want to run away again. I belong here, now."

Anthony dropped his portable. He froze, not even breathing.

Autumn looked around the corner and there, became face-to-face with his enemy. "Eve, what is the meaning of this?"

"I can explain."

"Get out," Autumn growled. "Get out right now!"

Eve pleaded, "But he's on our side, Autumn! He can speak with us, like we do! Anthony, say something!"

Anthony's heart was hammering. He focused his mind and thought, "I am not here to harm you."

"Like Hell you are. Eve, he is a human. It doesn't matter if he has found some way to speak with us. He is out for our blood."

"But the love!" Eve cried. "He can hear our voices because there is love between us!"

Autumn pounded his fist against the wall. "I have no love for this creature. His people have raided our planet, our town, taken us prisoner, and tortured us. Soon their sicknesses will invade us and kill us, one by one. How can I have love for something that is taking away everyone that I love and everything that I have? I have no love for him. I hate him."

But Autumn had already been invaded by the sickness; just not from Anthony.

Eve felt helpless.

"Get out!" Autumn yelled.

"I have to be with Eve," he said.

"Why?"

"Because I want to make sure she's alright," he said meekly.

Autumn's eyes were blazing with anger. "I am more than capable of handling that myself. Now please, get out before I kill you!"

"Autumn, no!" Eve yelled. "I love him!"

Autumn spun around. "What did you say?"

More quietly, she said, "I love this man."

He grabbed her arm and brought her into the next room.

"You don't love someone who is bent only on destruction. You love me, and our papa, and Lir, and Nela, and Benjamin. You don't love this monster who only wants to destroy you."

She turned to Anthony. "Get out of Communion." But he wouldn't budge.

"You are trying to destroy my sister but you won't succeed! None of you will, as long as I can help it!"

Autumn left the room. Anthony and Eve were both shaken. Anthony rushed to her. "What will happen?"

She looked to the door. "We will all know soon."

Rifled astronauts were everywhere. The dusty streets of Communion were in mayhem. Dozens of Novacadians were standing around as spectators, watching the impossible scene. Autumn had the strength of twenty men or more.

As one man approached, he pushed him, sailing him into the air forty feet away. No one could grasp him; he was plucking men off his body like juniper beetles.

From behind a bush, a man aimed to fire. Autumn held up his hand and the bullet went backwards, lodging into the leg of someone who was standing behind the young astronaut.

Some other Novacadians joined in; kicking and biting, with strength that could have only come from their mental powers. It was a full-out war.

Anthony and Eve watched the scene from the hut, not getting involved. Eve was shaking, obviously troubled by what was going on. Anthony hugged her to his body, feeling her warmth and heartbeat. Neither of them knew how it was going to turn out--how many lives would be taken.

More guns fired. Miraculously, none of them hit Autumn. Some of them fell to the ground, some of them hit other targets. Using his mind power, Autumn lifted a huge boulder and thrust it towards the armed men as though it were a baseball.

A man screamed out in pain, then silence. When Autumn's back was turned, someone aimed a rifle at him.

At the last second, he turned.

The bullet hit someone else.

Eve stood. Anthony looked to see who had gotten hit. Before he knew what was happening, Eve was running. "Eve, no!" Anthony yelled out loud.

But it was too late. He immediately saw why she had begun running. Her papa; lying in a pool of his own blood, was sprawled out on the ground. The wayward bullet had hit him.

Eve stroked his bloody cheeks with her feeble, shaking hands. "Papa, Papa," she telepathed. "No!" It was all over. Tears were streaming down her face. She didn't stop stroking his face until Autumn approached her.

"Now you see why I want all these savages killed."

She looked up, tears dripping fast from her chin, and suddenly there was fierce anger in her eyes. She stood up,

raised her finger, and pointed at him. "You killed him!" she said. "It was because of you, Autumn, you!"

Autumn lowered his head. "Just think of it this way, Eve: he died in the name of freedom."

In a flash of wind and fire and lightning, Eve raised her hand to Autumn, and without even touching him she threw him 100 feet into the air to his death.

The townspeople were curious to see if he had survived, but the astronauts quickly regained control. They put Novacadians in shackles, led them temporarily back to their homes, and activated the force fields for a lockdown. As prisoner, they took Eve.

"She is not the messiah," they said. "She has succumbed to hatred," they said. "We were all wrong." Shaking their heads, they repeated, "All wrong."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

In her cell on board the airbase, the walls were two-foot thick made of corrugated steel. The astronauts weren't taking any chances with her.

Anthony spoke before General Garrison. "She trusts me," he said. "I was the one who was with her in the caves, and I visited her several times in Communion. She can't be all alone in that sterile cell hour after hour, day after day. Let me try and talk to her."

"She won't understand you, Lieutenant," he said.

"I know that," he answered. "But no matter if you're a Novacadian or a human, she's bound to need a little company. Novacadians are social beings. She'll go crazy like that."

"Very well, then," he said. "But be brief. You saw with your own eyes what she did yesterday."

He nodded his head and left the general's quarters. He took a flight of stairs down, then headed down the hallway to the barracks.

The attending guard let him in. "I'll just be a few minutes," Anthony explained.

Eve was weeping on her bed. Anthony immediately softened when he saw her. "You can close it now," he told the guard.

"Anthony," she cried, with arms open. Her face was wet; covered with tears. He immediately embraced her.

"It's okay," he soothed. "You're alright."

"My brother is dead," she breathed between sobs. "My father..."

"I know, I know."

She looked up at him. "How long will I have to stay here?" she asked.

He nodded his head. "Just until they're sure you won't be a threat to them any longer."

She gasped. "But how is that supposed to happen?" She pulled away from him. "After what happened, I'm not even sure I trust myself anymore. I killed my own brother!"

He stroked her hand. "Remember? He was caught by the sickness."

More tears fell from her eyes. "And now...I am, too."

"You can't say that."

"But it's true! The passion I felt, when Autumn killed my father--I had never felt such a feeling of blazing hot anger in all my life. And soon, I will be like my sister and brother--I, too, will die."

"Your sister?"

"Lir. She will deteriorate and die as though she had a disease of the flesh."

"And you're afraid that the same thing will happen to you?"

She looked away. "I know it will."

They fell into silence. Anthony had never been convinced that Eve truly was a messiah, but he was beginning to change his mind. Her quiet courage, even in the most pressing of situations, was beyond anything that Anthony had ever seen.

"Eve?" he asked.

She turned to him.

"I know your people don't have sex, but--"

She looked at him curiously.

"Do you kiss?"

She let her legs drop over the edge of the bed. "You mean, like humans? On the lips?"

"Yes."

She looked deep into his eyes, her tear-lined lashes lowering to meet his. "I suppose it's possible."

Her lips were smooth, cool, and free of imperfections. She was crying as they kissed.

"Anthony, you have to let go of your hatred."

He pulled his lips away from hers. "Sarah, the old woman, told me that my hatred was justified."

She placed her small, pale hand on his heart. "You hate God, Anthony. You hate Him for taking Kate away from you."

He was filled with such deep emotions at that point that it was hard for him not to start crying, as well. He looked away. "That's not possible," he said.

"What? It's impossible that you hate Him or it's impossible for you to let go of your hatred?"

He changed the subject. "I thought we had different gods."

She smiled at him through her tearstained face. "We have the same God, but different messiahs. There is a difference."

"Why are you asking me all this?" he said.

She looked down. "Because you're going to have to let go of me."

They held a meeting that night on the airbase in one of the conference rooms. All of the senior officers were in attendance. The atmosphere was tense as the men and women took their seats and waited for the meeting to proceed.

"It is obvious we have a very different situation on our hands now," Captain Booker remarked. "The Novacadians are becoming more and more dangerous by the second."

"I agree," Captain Anderson said. "It is highly likely that they will become even more dangerous as time goes on if we don't do something to intervene."

"So what do you propose?" General Garrison asked. He looked from each of the faces, each with expressions of grim seriousness.

"Total annihilation," a man said. "It's apparent that the only answer is to get rid of them."

"I agree," they each said.

General Garrison felt an odd sense of guilt at even considering the option, and yet he knew he had an obligation to preserve the safety of his men--and any way he could do it.

Rubbing at his temples, he said, "So how shall we go about this?"

CHAPTER TWENTY

The storm was growing in size; and it was moving, as well. It was descending upon the town of Communion. Anthony went back to the surface the next day to pay a special visit to the two sisters, and as he looked up, the black, swirling mass covered half of the vast sky. The two sisters met him with tired eyes.

"She can't die," he told them, coming into their room.

"But she is going to," Sarah said. "You have to accept that."

"Is she the messiah?"

They looked at each other. "Most of us have lost hope. Really, none of us knows now."

"But you were so sure," he said. "Why do you give up simply because she made a mistake? It was a flaw. Can't a messiah have a flaw?"

"Either way," they said, "she is going to die."

He shook his head in disbelief. "I think it's sick and cruel; far worse than any of the things that the humans have done to you. You can't let her die. She can save you without having to sacrifice herself."

He sat down on the edge of the bed, dropping his head into his hands. Sarah began stroking his back. "You're going to miss her, aren't you?" she said.

"I love her," he breathed.

"Then you'll understand that if she is our savior, then she has to do this. Not just for the sake of God, not just for the sake of the Novacadians, but for all of our sakes."

He looked up, now with tears in his eyes. "The IAST is planning to kill all of you," he said. "I overheard them talking at camp. They don't like what's been happening lately." He looked at his hands. "If Eve is the one who is supposed to stop it, then how can she do anything if she is caged up in that cell on the airbase?" He stopped. "Wait. I can do something. They let me into her cell yesterday..."

"Yes?"

"If I ask to see her again, perhaps I can sneak her out."

"Anthony, it's worth a try."

He took a shuttle back up to the airbase that evening. He told the guard that General Garrison had given him permission to see the Novacadian again, and the guard promptly let him back into the small, sterile cell. Eve was sitting on the bench, looking rather bored.

He straightened himself. "The IAST is planning on taking out the village," he said. "You are the messiah. You're the only one who can stop it."

"So how can I do anything about it?" she asked. "I'm here."

Still using mental telepathy, he said, "I'm going to get you out of here."

Her eyes widened. "How on Novacadia are you going to do that?"

He crossed the cell to her. "I'll take the guard down. And when he's out of the way, I'll lead you to a private shuttle."

She looked down. "But Anthony, I'm not the messiah. I've been defeated."

"Yes, you are," he urged. "You have to be. You're their last hope; they need you."

She looked into his eyes. "You do realize what that will mean?"

Ne nodded. "Yes, I do."

He closed her eyes. "Alright."

Anthony first had to think of an appropriate way to overpower the guard. It came to him after a moment. After he knocked on the door to be let out, he engaged the man in light conversation, making sure that the door was still a fraction of an inch open. Eve was huddled in a corner, watching with the eye of an eagle.

Then, at a break in the conversation, he said, "I think there's something wrong with the Novacadian. She might be sick; she won't open her eyes. Will you take a look?"

The guard--the only one present in the hall, turned and went through the door before Anthony.

When his back was turned, Anthony slammed the heavy door against his head. The man fell over, knocked out cold.

Eve stepped over the unconscious man.

"Follow me, Eve," he said. "All we have to do is not be seen; then I can smuggle you into one of the shuttles."

They rushed through the narrow halls, ducking behind doorways when they heard footsteps. When all was clear, they resumed their path to the shuttle room.

Miraculously, they had made it there without any disturbances; no one had seen them. Anthony gestured to one of the shuttles. "This is the one I took on my way here. It should do fine. Just stay in the back, and they shouldn't see you."

Eve embraced him. "Because of you, Anthony," she said, "we've all been saved. Without you, we would have all been destined to die."

Anthony held her hands briefly. "I'm not so sure of that," he said. "You're the brave one. I could never amount to what you are."

The doors to the shuttle room opened. Armed guards were standing there. "Stop right where you are!" they yelled.

Anthony froze. Eve stepped behind him. It was all over in a fraction of a second. Anthony punched the remote that would open the outer doors, intending to hop into the shuttle with Eve and fly out fast. Eve edged backwards; but she went too far; she fell over the edge.

Anthony ran to the edge. "No!" he screamed.

The guards were no longer pointing their weapons at him. Anthony hopped into the shuttle and touched down onto the surface. Eve was gone.

The Novacadians in the town watched as the black, swirling mass swallowed up the airbase. Two weeks later, all the Novacadians were speaking out loud, but no one knew why; no one, that is, except for Anthony.

The time warp had sent the humans three-thousand years into the past.

That meant that Novacadians were humans, evolved over thousands of years.

But there was one missing link.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Ten years ago, a strange person of great beauty arrived in the Chicago area. Anthony had never seen such a woman before in all his life. She had long, blonde hair, large, dark, almond-shaped eyes, and a confident posture.

He fell in love with her immediately.

They started dating, seeing each other with more and more frequency as the weeks wore on, and soon, they got engaged. On a colorful September Saturday, they were married in a small Catholic Church in a suburb of Chicago.

But two years into their marriage, tragedy struck. A drunk driver was weaving ahead of them on the road, and with the distraction, Anthony didn't see the eighteen-wheeler coming straight at him from the oncoming traffic.

Eve was killed almost instantly.

Eight years later, Anthony paid a visit to the new frontier in space discoveries. It was a planet called Novacadia.

There, while working with the friendly, talkative natives, he met the next new love of his life.

Her name was Kate, and she was a fellow astronaut.

She was absolutely charming.