



**The Perennial Migration**  
**By**  
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## Prologue

In 2053, the World Administration took form after the collapse of society during the global war of 2040, and caused the split of the human race. It installed a colossal network of various sized domes around the planet within a short period. Most of the materials required for the dome and inner-platform construction was to be transported to underground factories during the decade before the outbreak of the war. Unmanned covert drones carried the network parts at night. Each dome contained a platform, the smallest being for defence had five levels. Once the defence domes came into position, larger domes had to be built to contain accommodation towers, and other buildings such as hospitals and shopping malls.

A tunnel network connected the domes. Trains delivered commerce goods underground and for personal travel at Earth level. The dome shells contained a series of inter-linking blue hexagon-shaped panels which, once in place and sealed, provided outer protection against attack. One large panorama screen covered the whole inner-dome shell. These screens provided a non-stop artificial “day and night” environment, marketing advertisements and World Administration-controlled news. The prepared evacuation of the elite class communities in each country orchestrated the split within human race. In the main-stream media, a series of crisis summits provided conversation content everywhere; with high-profile coverage serving as the curtain for the otherwise unexplained movement of the members and families of the elite class. It was said that many countries had desperate need of financial rescue and supply of emergency resources. That this could be managed if citizens moved to the central locations. The sell of this story to the public was a total success.

With most citizens being relieved of personal savings to settle the invented national debt, if not taking part in riots, most scavenged for work or food. At this time, with most people weakened, the “cleansing” took place as per the scheduled secret agenda. Those citizens who conformed joined the Administration Centres and received food and accommodation. And if selected, training was available for trades, designed to improve country economy.

Those joining the Centres underwent a series of recruitment tests for various trades and moved according to the test results. Those moved, left in the belief that others, including friends and relatives, followed –

which was not the case! The identification wrist chips, implanted as part of the registration, received an update to make sure that those people could never re-enter the Centres once escorted from the premises.

Once cleansing was complete, the Administration Centres closed. After the split, the people who did not pass trade training and relocation, found themselves left behind in derelict cities and suburbs. Electrical power was available from groups of survivalists who owned solar generators. But as people fought over gaining access to generators, those survivalists moved away; out into the wilderness. For many who stayed behind, the wilderness came to them as wild animals and others beings no longer feared the dominance and havoc of mankind.

As soon as the World Administration erected the domes and the inner-platforms, a large settlement grew around the outer perimeter of the network. These people lived off of and traded with the refuse dumped from dome residents. The refuse disposal unit ejected white plastic cocoons through a tube one metre in diameter. The cocoons being lightweight and designed to be collected by strong winds or the 'old breed' (network residents being the newer breed). At first, the cocoons got plundered upon exit from the disposal tubes, which lead to a foul stench returning to the inner-dome. Later a cocoon unlocked once it passed a distance of one kilometre outside any dome.

The non-chevron trade workers, who had permission to move within the Earth level non-accommodation platforms and outer-dome perimeter, had regular contact with the old breed settlement. Even though within the dome platform establishments high security measures was everywhere to be seen, Earth level was different. Various trading took place between the non-chevron trade workers and the old breed settlement, by use of refuse disposal tubes.

Many old breed members had even managed, until chip security upgraded, to have the wrist chip reset and updated to a non-chevron trade. The media continued to bombard dome residents with so-called live coverage of "old breed" incidents of theft and famines. Portrayed as being filmed via drone for safety reasons. Presenters reassured viewers that regular acts of charity took place to help the old breed. With dome residents encouraged to donate entertainment and shopping units.

Much of the media news film covered areas showing refuse disposal

cocoons being plundered and the non-usable waste left on a dump. You always had a few of the old breed in these film clips combing through for edibles and other items for salvage. Such clips always came in useful when news space needed to be filled. As the years passed, the number of domes within the global network grew, as did the height of many of the existing ones. The older breed became more self-reliant and moved more and more away from the dome perimeter. Many taking to the forests, mountains, and even oceans; with the ruined cities left behind, overgrown and no longer offering shelter or safety for defenceless humans.

The series of events so far had been part of an evil agenda, executed and controlled by one force; who now claimed to be the newer breed and owners of the planet Earth – The World Administration. Unknown to them though they had not been the only species with an agenda and had hosted the completion of one which was much older and darker. The time for change was overdue.

One thing was for sure, Mother Earth herself needed to pull strings to help a most inappropriate group of candidates take command of the migration. To defend against many terrestrial enemies, secure the future survival of mankind and the recovery of the planet.

## Chapter 1

On the platform of a discipline dome a non-public military court case begun. Once the judge, Jury, lawyers, clerks and witnesses had seated, the door to the court dock opened. A pair of custodial officers escorted the still double chevron No.105781259 soldier, known as Leo (Leopold) to friends and family, hand-cuffed into the dock. The grey tungsten caged dock provided enough room for the prisoner and the escorts to sit (and stand when summoned). The court clerk announced that the prisoner was in attendance and that the charge against him read 'Conspiring against the World Administration'.

When asked how he the prisoner intended to plea, the lawyer who represented Leo as duty lawyer answered "My client pleads 'Not Guilty', Sir of Justice."

The court clerk called each witness to the dock. Each of the five gave a version of what happened during the secret meetings held by Leo. Questions in the style '*if it wasn't this was it that*' continued, to draw the Jury's attention towards negative possibilities.

Leo's lawyer portrayed the whole matter from different angles. From forming a work union through to a psychological condition. A condition which signalled that although the welfare of colleagues concerned him, the pressures of his own work led him looking for ways to cope.

Leo was not as well defended as he may have been if he had hired a private lawyer. Prior to his arrest he had confided in his sister True. That he was a target due to his demands for a union and because of the candidate campaign work he prepared. Escorts took Leo from the dock back to the cells while the Jury discussed and confirmed the verdict.

After twenty minutes he was back out in the dock. Everyone stood up as the Jury announced that the verdict was 'Guilty'. Although murmurs came from the public viewers in attendance after hearing the verdict, none dared question the decision made. It was obvious to many in attendance that the judge had prepared his script as he proceeded with the prompt issue of the sentence.

The judge now looked at the ginger haired prisoner, and said "Prisoner One Zero Five Seven Eight One Two Five Nine, you are found guilty of conspiring against the World Administration. I sentence you to banishment from the World Administration network. You are to be stripped of rank and citizenship. The wrist chip data is to

be invalidated. Escorts, remove Prisoner One Zero Five Seven Eight One Two Five Nine from the court.”

Having dedicated his years to earn promotions as a soldier, Leo never considered how life was outside the dome network. He had even been a member of teams who's job it was to protect the network domes against intruders from the old breed settlement. Now he was to be at the old breed's mercy. He hoped for a chance of being accepted at the settlement – otherwise he seen his days of survival to be few.

Below in the cell network, the escorts took Leo to a scan room. A machine situated on a small round metal table caught his attention. Sat on the chair provided, he received the order to place his wrist with the palm of his hand over the scanner. A custodial officer, in grey uniform, typed in an instruction on the device keyboard. The scan took place and after ten minutes was complete and had wiped the data stored within the chip. A small injection jab numbed the skin, and a cut was made for the chip to be extracted. Then the realisation of what happened hit him, the conspiracy and what he lost. Leo broke as the tears overwhelmed his otherwise strong posture.

Officers took him back to the cell while his discharge and exit from the network was prepared. One guard unlocked the cell door and Leo received a sand-coloured pair of canvas trousers, shirt, pullover, jacket and cap of the same colour and material. One pair of green socks, black leather boots and belt got issued just before departure. A custodial officer remained in the cell so that Leo's W.A.F uniform and military identification metal chain and rectangular discs could be confiscated. Once dressed, Leo was to board one of the W.A.F armed discipline vehicles. On board, although the equipment was available to place passengers in chains secured to the floor and walls, Leo could sit unrestricted. The reason was due to a short one-way route.

The vehicle glided out from the dock, locked onto the dome exit portal convoy and was placed in line for launch. After the vehicle's release from the convoy, the custodial driver continued flight course for full ahead until what looked to be a lighted open space appeared. The vehicle descended and hovered one metre from the ground. The open space measured fifty metres in diameter, surrounded by wooden market stands. Today though a large old breed crowd was in attendance to watch the W.A.F discipline vehicle arrive at the settlement marketplace.

One of the custodial officers on board prompted Leo to stand and

walk to the vehicle exist hatch. As Leo stood and edged towards the exit, the custodial officer removed the hand-cuffs and gave him a shove from the rear; which pushed Leo over the vehicle exit hatch threshold. Instinct ensured that his arms stretched out in front of his body, to prepare for a frontal landing on the ground. But Leo brought his legs and feet forward to descend upon the dusty floor of the marketplace. Once the dust had cleared, as he had expected the old breed encircled him, bearing tools and weapons.



## Chapter 2

The rattling started again and by now Thorn no longer noticed the window's protective orange metal plate beating off of the glass over on the passenger side. To repair it meant replacing the foam insulation frame, which an old breed smith could do in the same time it took a worker to re-charge the vehicle battery. But due to recent power theft, every O.D.S.V (Outer-Dome Sealing Vehicle) had to be re-charged within the core security zone on the inner-dome platform. So unless Thorn received a task to work on the outer seal of the lower dome section, it was difficult justifying being at Earth level. Today the complete non-chevron maintenance crew deployed in force, with every available O.D.S.V deployed.

An official visit and inspection of the defence domes by the W.A.F Commander, General Kern was due to take place. For Thorn he saw this as a chance to clock overtime, which ensured that his entertainment and shopping card received a long awaited credit of units. His first-chevron supervisor had given the Defence Dome 102 repair task to him. Because of the high-profile visit (and consequences if something went wrong) at least repair materials became available. Stock was then in adequate quantities and the quartermaster became cooperative when processing orders.

Now having pulled his O.D.S.V from the power dock on the core security zone, Thorn launched the vehicle from one of the inner-dome exit portals; for his first repair shift on the outer panels of Defence Dome 102. Once in the exit portal convoy lane, with the W.A.F media reporter pushing censored news through the radio, Thorn fell into a day dream. Dreams which sometimes carried on running into his work shift. He often flashed back to childhood memories. One was the time playing 'hide and seek' together with his brother and sister in the family garden out in the countryside of the south west of England. With his parents watching from the wooden pavilion, while preparing soft drinks and cake on the round table and calling 'Leopold', 'Thornton', 'Trudy' once ready.

Another flashback took him to one of the Administration Centres, which the World Administration had built. Still young, neither Thorn, his older brother Leopold, nor his younger sister Trudy had any idea that the 'good intentions' of the Centre staff caused the parents' permanent separation. Although both too old to learn a trade, the boys

received training with the non-chevron crews on account of necessity during the construction phase of the dome network.

As the O.D.S.V in front drove through the portal and disappeared from sight, the blast of daylight hit against his windscreen; for a short time before the visor completed the journey across the front window pane. This restored Thorn's front vision again. When the 'clunk' sound could be heard on both sides, and the vehicle rocked before stabling itself, it showed that the O.D.S.V was free from the convoy frame. He pressed the 'Hover' button on the main console and released the brakes by pulling the handle and proceeded with pressing the speed trigger on the steering bar. Once out of the dome, he said "Dome One Zero Two." into the navigation console microphone and followed course to the destination.

## Chapter 3

Patients with cardiac problems filled the beds in the Hospital Dome 97. The direct result of living in a secluded world, with the fast-food industry giants gaining financial strength to prepare for the World Administration takeover. The daily media supplied pictures of appetising and succulent meals. And everyone had enough complimentary vouchers stored on the Entertainment & Shopping cards to continue loyal unhealthy eating whenever desired. At the Administration Centre Trudy 105781261, qualified as a nurse and after training got assigned to Hospital Dome 97.

During pre-training registration surnames could no longer be used and staff claimed it optimal for personnel records if everyone just used the identification number. But it was allowed to use forenames for oral communication. Trudy, otherwise known as 'True' to her brothers, obsessed with her profession; often stayed on after her own shift to help colleagues during busy periods. She always looked forward to the visits Thorn made during her free time at home. That Thorn watched over his sister she was aware as he always used the excuse he had work on, which took him towards her accommodation.

She wished that it was possible to spend time with her brother Leo too. But since his demotion from the rank of double chevron Administration Force soldier and citizenship ban she had not seen him.

True found it strange that during the last year, the amount of people entering hospital for allergies around the skin above the implanted wrist chips, did not reduce. And many returned several times due to the severe pain the open wounds inflicted. As the law forbid the removal of wrist chips, True and her colleagues tried to treat patients infected with the virus as best as possible with medication. For hygienic reasons, two wards served as quarantine and hospital staff wore protective clothing when in those areas. And because of the infectious threat this virus posed, the official visit from the W.A.F Commander had to be changed to the defence domes.

A part of the registration procedure in the Administration Centres was the compulsory implantation of wrist chips. The staff explained that the benefits of the implanted chips provided identification, monitoring and healing of most medical conditions. And that for personal protection it ensured that people without a chip implant could not enter the dome network without an alarm being sounded. The

implantation procedure took ten minutes to complete after a dose of anaesthetic. And involved placing a flimsy film of circuit under the skin next to the middle veins and a few centimetres from the thumb joint. The other benefits did not apply to the individual, such as tracking and infliction of pain if the person strayed over ten metres away from an outside dome panel. Adjustments had to be made for those whose trade required working near the dome panels.

The symptoms of the virus had first shown when the victims had to have the chips scanned, for example when travelling to a holiday resort dome. Victims described that when the chip got scanned, it felt as if a small rake gauged through the skin. Within hours of being scanned, small craters appeared around the chip part of the wrists, which turned to a light pink colour. Within a day a purple fowl smelling fluid oozed from these enlarged open pores. Upon examination under various microscopes doctors found that the fluid was a live organism, that ate most materials. Even more strange was that the virus did not cause decay of the host's body, as if a survival instinct existed for the 'host' to be protected. For reasons unknown the fluid did not erode or penetrate glass items, which made it possible to store the fluid in test tubes.

## Chapter 4

With the noise of the O.D.S.V's electro-motor deceleration overwhelming the voice on the radio, Thorn pulled his vehicle onto one of the magnetic strips; which ran over the circumference of the dome and switched gears to 'Park'. Once the vehicle locked onto the strip, Thorn donned his brown fatigue jacket and strapped his tool work-pouch to his black utility belt. He pressed a small square button positioned on the back of his boot, which activated an embedded hover jet. The roof hatch door of the O.D.S.V opened by an hydraulic arm. Thorn appeared above the vehicle with a panel scanner in his hand, ready to begin inspection of each dome panel. As long as the vehicle was part of the magnetic strip network, it followed in the direction the driver went; which ensured that that person stayed within the ten metre outer-dome limit.

The outer-dome limit applied to the newer breed citizens. He found that to get the best reading on the scanner, it needed to be held fifteen centimetres away from the panel. This enabled the full one metre thick beige panel shell to be scanned for cracks. The seals surrounding the panels had to be measured for air-tightness, and if they discovered a leak filled it with a sealant compound using a custom designed gun. By midday Thorn inspected two layers of panels on one side of Defence Dome 102, which was due to those panels being low maintenance. Of these, ten seals and three panels with large cracks needed to be repaired. He decided it was time to stop for lunch and returned to the O.D.S.V.

On the side panel of the vehicle he opened a storage container and pulled the collapsible board up, which he used as a table. Another pull-out board served well as a place to sit. Because he always prepared his own packed lunch mornings before leaving for work, he had no surprise snacks! Plus it contained the usual share of cheese and tomato substitute sandwiches after which he drank coffee from a flask. As he ate his lunch he faced away from the dome to enjoy the view of the forest. Over time the edge of the forest had advanced over the boundary fence, and displayed strength by sprouting a network of thickened green forage, sending thin feelers out on reconnaissance.

As he bit into his sandwich he was sure he was under surveillance, but even with quick reflexes when he looked up he seen the same forest picture. Thorn finished his lunch and packed the things away.

One perk he enjoyed was that he did not have to clock out and back in when he took lunch, out on inspection or repair jobs. Today, although sunny it still had the chill that winter had left. The aroma of fresh grass mixed with buttercup provided the perfect picnic scenario. While he pressed the button on his boot to switch the 'hover' jet back on, he knew again that something watched from a distance; but this time he carried on as though he did not notice. Being an open person, Thorn welcomed the possibility of contact with a non-human intelligent life form.

On the inner side of his boot was a series of buttons, marked 'Up' 'Land' 'Speed' 'Stop'. As one had to stay balanced with the one leg as the opposite boot activated any of the buttons, it made the use difficult. Thorn now tapped the 'Up' button and ascended to the third layer of panels to begin the inspection. While ascending the outer shell of the dome, Thorn twisted his body so he faced the forest. As he turned, his gaze went in the same direction. And he saw it! The watcher, positioned between trees but not in the open – instead used the trees as cover.

Although Thorn appreciated that he might not have long to inspect the watcher before it disappeared into the wilderness; he noted characteristics of the being during the few moments in which glares of both connected. Thorn had the eerie feeling that this being was not human. Although from the posture it could have passed as human if it had not been for the leaf features which broke the silhouette. Standing at an estimated height of one hundred and fifty centimetres, the watcher radiated an aura of peace, knowing and understanding. The skin a pea-green texture as was the colour of the watcher's thin lips. Green leaves grew out from the skin and covered the side of the head, where humans had ears, and top of the head. The watcher's clothing could not be fully seen through the trees. Thorn saw the material though, consisting of a moss substance. As soon as the visual scrutiny was over, he gave a friendly wink and nod of his head before turning and proceeding with his paid job.

## Chapter 5

After pushing a double shift, True logged out at the matron's office and waited for the next elevator to arrive. Her reflection in the elevator door showed that her short brunette hair was not as styled as when her shift had begun. The dome platform elevator network had an independent over-head mono-rail which enabled each hanging capsule, which accommodated one person; to travel in every direction. It was possible for a capsule to travel through multiple dome platform networks to reach a particular destination.

As True waited for the elevator, her fatigued facial expression covered the somewhat shy look of guilt. Which may have otherwise have drawn attention to the fact of her not wanting to be stopped now for a bag check by the W.A.F. The next elevator capsule arrived, and the door opened. Although her blue plastic satchel had extra padding inside, True still took extra care to avoid any accidental knocks to it as she entered the capsule. In the elevator capsule True could sit in a comfortable position.

After instructing the navigation console which route to take, she checked her email first and placed an order for an evening dinner. Dinner was to be delivered to her apartment on the fourth floor of Accommodation Dome 56, which for convenience was the next nearest living quarters to the Hospital Dome 97. While in the capsule, True had to make sure that the satchel remained safe from damage. And maintain her typical travelling behaviour, as each capsule had a built-in security camera for alleged safety reasons.

So after ordering a warm meal of pasta and tomato sauce, she returned to reading and responding to her incoming emails. The capsules had no actual windows, but instead had rotating adverts beamed on the inside panels to keep the passenger occupied. Purchases could be made direct via a touch-keyboard pulled from a virtual menu. The red digit five-minute destination arrival countdown appeared above the capsule door. True arose and collected her satchel in preparation as the capsule docked at her apartment.

The apartment door had to be opened by face recognition, and on days when her fatigue altered her facial expression; the recognition took sixty seconds longer due to the micro-processor scrolling through the gigantic memory database searching for a facial match. Once in her apartment, True placed her satchel on a small round table next to her

lounge couch; before swiping her entertainment and shopping card through the slit to the left of her apartment's delivery portal. The card unit value display showed a deduction of a few units, which triggered the portal door to open; allowing True to collect her evening meal. She took a quick shower and donned soft and comfortable clothing.

As she ate her meal she switched the wall screen on to catch up on her regular and favourite soap shows. And for a short period forgot that she had smuggled something out of the hospital. But a sudden jolt in her mind triggered a reminder for her to check in her satchel. True finished her dinner as fast as possible and took the satchel into the bathroom; as she thought it might be safer to open it there instead of in the lounge. As she opened the satchel bit by bit, her heart jumped as the door bell rang. Panicking she thought what to do next.

True closed the bathroom door and reassured the visitor with “Wait a minute.” which sounded fake as she could have first checked the entrance cam display to view who was there, had time allowed. Without checking the surveillance camera, she opened the front door. Upon the door opening, she heard “Hi True!” and smelt the somewhat sweet aftershave her brown haired brother always wore; when he walked past her and looked towards the lounge table hoping that he was in time to grab her diner leftovers. While Thorn focused on the takeaway container, True closed the front door and for the first time; wanted her brother to leave.

True greeted her brother with “Hi Thorn, how's it going? Any news?”

Thorn had made himself comfortable on her couch as usual, and shrugged both his shoulders as he confirmed “Oh the usual, nothing much. I'm getting overtime in at work due to what's-his-name's visit – you know, um the World Administration Force Commander, Kern, General Kern, that's him. But that's it with me. And you? You look as though you haven't slept for a while. And why are you still standing? Is something wrong sis?”

Trudy remembered that she could never fool her brother Thorn, and said “You're correct I guess, I have slept less than I wanted. I took another shift as we didn't have enough on call to cover. So yeah, I'll be glad to get to bed – you staying long?”

“True, come on, what's with you? So nervous – Hello! You can't fool me! You keep looking over at the bathroom and now you want rid of me?”



Trudy, noticing the conversation took a direction she did not want and knowing Thorn may extend his visit duration now that his interest awoke, accepted that it was time for defeat. She exhaled a saved up gasp and said “Thorn, do me a favour please and get the pair of cleaning gloves which are wedged under the sink in the kitchen; and join me in the bathroom – I want to show you something.”

Thorn first thought that the toilet needed repairing for his sister. But having arrived in the bathroom after having first collected the cleaning gloves, with thoughts of toilet cleaning, he was surprised and curious at what he might now confront. True pulled the test tube out from her satchel and held it up for her brother to inspect.

“What's that? I mean how did you get that purple stuff?” Thorn asked as he closed in on the cork-sealed glass tube which True now held up in her hand.

“I don't understand myself yet what it might be. But what I know is that many patients are in quarantine, who have open skin pores with this fluid erupting. And that the stuff grows and grows if not contained in a glass compound, for example this test tube.” said True.

Thorn made a cupping-hand gesture and said “Heck True, don't drop it, just don't drop it! So how come the patients are still alive?”

“Well we understand that the fluid doesn't harm the actual person from whose pores it spouted. With the patients in quarantine, it's unknown just how contagious or damaging the stuff is. For these people, admission to hospital was voluntary after a recent chip scan, with complaints of severe pain around the wrist parts with the implant. And within a day the patients had a series of miniature craters in the same part of skin.” True explained as if she still wasn't believing it herself.

“What happens when the fluid comes into contact with other objects?” Thorn asked.

“First take a cotton ball using the gloves.” True said pointing at the gloves.

He donned the gloves and collected one of the cotton balls as requested.

True gave a hand signal for him to bring the white piece of cotton over, and as he came closer she opened the test tube and urged “Quick! Push the cotton into the test tube – that's it.”

Once the cotton was inside, True re-sealed the test tube. They both watched to see what might happen next to the fluffy ball inside the

tube.

## Chapter 6

On the platform deck of the W.A.F headquarters, five hundred troops stood in multiple rows. A platform deck was long and wide enough to accommodate such regiment sizes including vehicles. The steel platforms, rectangle in shape, served as a runway for the vehicles without the hover technology. Shuttles, of the hover jet design, could park in one of the magnetic docks and then use the auto-launch. Two benefits the dome protection offered was that no wind blew over the platforms, and that artificial lighting controlled the 'day and night' timings.

With an exact personal body height of two metres, General Kern looked at the top of each soldier's hat during his start-of-week inspection. The troops' black uniforms came in two styles, parade suit and combat. The five hundred Troops on parade today was not the complete force, but just those under his direct command. In addition, troops manned the defence dome platforms. Kern walked along the line of troops on parade, accompanied by the Adjutant who served as his assistant.

When standing next to Kern, who with his peaked cap and grey trimmed hair emitted a strong aura of authority enhanced by the smell of his leather trench coat; the Adjutant was sure he was not being recognised as a holder of his rank. But instead lowered to the same rank as the troops in front of them being inspected. After the parade was over and Kern and his Adjutant had left, the Company Commanders dismissed the troops. Kern retired to his office and awaited his Adjutant for the weekly schedule briefing. The door elevated above head as the Adjutant entered.

“General, permission to go ahead with the agenda is requested.” The Adjutant asked.

“Granted. Go ahead.” Kern instructed in a mundane tone.

The Adjutant continued “General, you have a scheduled visit to the Hospital Dome Ninety Seven this week. The exact appointment date and time remains for you to confirm.”

“That is fine. Any other events of higher priority scheduled?” Kern asked.

The Adjutant answered “No, General, but we have one issue which you need to know of before the hospital visit takes place.”

Kern enquired “And what is that exact issue Adjutant?”

“The Hospital Director has submitted a report that an outbreak of a virus has occurred, and that the infected patients are in a quarantine ward. General, do you consider it safe to keep the appointment?” Asked the Adjutant.

The General announced “Adjutant, we will still make the intended visit. At the hospital I shall interview the Director and thereafter decide on a plan of action. And I will demand an explanation why the report did not reach me earlier.” with an accusing look at the Adjutant as he spoke.

Kern added “Adjutant, make the transport arrangements. And get me the wrist chip statistics for last month – the Holiday Resort Dome reported a drop of twenty percent! I want to know which activities occupied this twenty percent. Did they do overtime? Did they shop?”

The Adjutant found out before that Kern had purchased many shares in the holiday resort companies. And so paid a special interest in ensuring that the resort was always full of guests. He wondered why Kern continued to scold him for the slightest mistakes and now because of the virus outbreak! If he had not had warned the General, Kern might not be any the wiser. And been even more angry had he visited the hospital not knowing of the disease in advance.

The Adjutant asked “Any other orders General?”

“Yes Adjutant, I have decided that due to the seriousness of the virus outbreak, we will visit this afternoon. Make the arrangements for the meeting on the platform deck at fourteen hundred hours. Nothing else for now.” confirmed Kern.

The Adjutant made a swift salute, turned on his heels, drove a boot to the ground and marched out of the office. He was an expert assistant and had made the transport booking and made sure that the escort guard contained adequate troops. The Adjutant now stood on the central platform marking, fifteen minutes before the appointment, to make sure everything was in place for the General. At five minutes past two in the afternoon, never on time as usual, Kern travelled to the platform deck by elevator. As always, he put on a stern face when in front of subordinates – he had a repute of being a ruthless superior to support. Although the General had spotted his Adjutant, he stood still and waited for the man to hurry over and report that everything was ready. The Adjutant had booked the transport and escort troops and felt sorry for the over-worked hospital staff who could not prepare for the visit.

“General, the transport and escort troops await orders.” confirmed the Adjutant.

At the same time as the T.T.V's (Troop Transport Vehicles) landed on the platform. A T.T.V held the form of a rectangular block with a cockpit at the front. The beige steel shell hosted a sliding door on the left side, which enabled bulk entry from troops or cargo if converted.

With the escort troops on board, Kern complimented “Excellent. Now get on board.”

Crouched and holding his hat on his head with one hand, the General ran to the T.T.V's entrance and continued through to the cockpit.

To keep pace with Kern the Adjutant had to run. Upon Kern's arrival in the cockpit, the T.T.V Commander, while in radio contact with the rest of the convoy; switched on the hover jet and typed the destination coordinates into the navigation console. He closed the steel side door from within the cockpit and launched the vehicle to embark on the planned journey.

## Chapter 7

As soon as the old breed advanced, Leo crouched, covered his head with his arms and closed his eyes. And waited for the first blows to pound against his body. He heard the dry dust on the ground spread under the weight of shuffling boots, and so was even more puzzled not to yet have pain inflicted. Leo opened his eyes as one of them shouted “Circle Defence!”

Within seconds the old breed in attendance had formed a circle, facing outwards from Leo's position. One of them, who gave the order earlier, entered the circle and approached him. The man was of sturdy build and on account of the brown leather oil-stained apron he wore, looked as though he was a metalsmith. Once he was next to Leo he said “Stand up and let me shake your hand.”

Relieved, Leo arose and without words gave the man his hand.

After he shook Leo's hand, the white haired man said “Hi I'm Relt, the smith and nominated leader.”

“Why the defence position?” Leo asked

“Because daylight is coming to an end and we should be tucked away safe – night belongs to the wild.” Relt warned, looking up direct at the sky. And as he looked back at Leo added “We, the old breed don't judge others and peoples' backgrounds are of no concern to us. We welcome those who come in peace.”

Leo gave a short smile in acceptance and confirmed “Yes, I come in peace and consider it an honour if you'd allow me to join your settlement.”

“Okay, enough with talk for now. Drop the ramp and let's get inside – everyone!” Relt prompted.

Everyone of them reacted, tugging on ropes around pulleys to lower a steel ramp; which allowed entry to an elevated network of pre-world war industrial cargo containers. Once inside, the whole settlement population was safe from predators. After the last of the old breed entered, the ramp was elevated and secured. Leo followed most of them to the main meeting place, although some others went elsewhere. The meeting hall, as they called it, served as a food canteen and had a large kitchen and storage container connected. Leo received a tour of the accommodation containers and learned that he was to share one with other members of the old breed. But he did find impressive how much space such a container offered.

Relt appeared later at Leo's container and mentioned "Forgive me, I forgot to ask you for your name, outside earlier. So what's your name?"

"No, it's fine, I should have introduced myself. 'Leo', well 'Leopold' but 'Leo' to friends and family." He confirmed.

"It shall be 'Leo'. Well it has been a long and hard day, so if you'd care to join me, we'll go and help prepare our evening meal with the rest." Relt said.

As they arrived at the meeting hall, everyone had been busy attending to various tasks, from setting tables to preparing food in the kitchen. Relt took Leo with him into the kitchen, and they both helped to place the full and hot pots along the bar. They assisted with serving plates at the opposite side of the bar, to the others who arrived for meals. Once everyone had received a meal, those in the kitchen took a plate and served themselves from the vegetables, potatoes, meats and bread, and joined the others at the tables.

Over dinner, Leo asked "Relt, so how does everyone know what responsibilities they have within the settlement?" And pointing to the kitchen added "Who hunts or gets food?"

Relt swallowed a chewed mouthful of vegetables. He took a drink of water and explained "Well the most important rule is that anyone who has a skill, from which the settlement could profit; should show themselves as an expert. Those who don't have a particular skill or trade, can choose from a list of tasks and can specialise in one if they wish. In addition, everyone is expected to help with what we call core tasks. This included defence, operating the ramp, and any other group jobs that needed help. As for food, we have a team of hunters and a group of refuse combers, who search through the plastic cocoons which exit the dome refuse disposal tubes."

Leo's chewing came to a sudden stop, at the thought of combing through refuse disposal cocoons. Relt, upon noticing Leo's face cringe, let out a loud laugh and added "Life outside the domes is different and hard, but we're free. No-one is forced to stay in the settlement though anyone can leave if they so wish."

"So what do you think best suits me as a trade?" asked Leo.

Pondering first for a few minutes on this question, Relt said "Um, well not knowing of your past, but looking at your strong physical build; I'd have tipped that you could be suited as a smith!"

"You said that peoples' backgrounds are not of concern. But to help

me fit best into the settlement, I must tell you that my skill is soldiering.” Leo disclosed.

Relt gave a knowing nod of his head and said “You're being modest Leo. And you'd be surprised how well you could use your soldiering skills with many trades. You don't have to stick with the one trade, you can try any others whenever you want. So is there any skill or trade which takes your fancy now?”

Leo was glad for the opportunity to select. It had been a long time since others showed an interest in him. So without further hesitation he said “Well, if possible, I'd love to have a go at hunting. At least then I'd have a better feeling being able to contribute more to the settlement.”

Relt was quick to confirm “Fine. But it's important to remember that everyone in the settlement contributes as best they can, and in many ways. As part of the hunting team you'll be trained and will need to learn the discipline of just hunting for our basic needs – we respect every creature.”

“I understand and respect that.” said Leo.

Relt confirmed “So hunting it shall be then. I'll let the quartermaster and the hunting group know. Tomorrow I'll take you the quartermaster to collect your clothing and equipment and then take you out to the hunting group at the outpost.”



## Chapter 8

Thorn did not even notice the sweat dripping from his forehead as he was concentrating on the contents of the test tube. As was True, but she concentrated more on making sure not to drop the test tube itself. In the test tube an interesting sequence took place. Both looked disappointed as nothing happened at first, but after thirty seconds the fluid saturated the cotton so the material itself changed colour from white to purple. Thorn gave a sigh as if to ask 'Was that it?' to himself. But True hinted to her brother with her face mimic to keep watching. Then as if the hint gave the fluid the signal to go ahead, it consumed or more sucked the mass of the cotton; and left behind the outer layer formed in a tiny ball. The fluid grew in quantity.

True provided commentary on what had just happened “Note the speed at which the fluid carried out this predatory act.”

Although Thorn took in everything True had said, he could not speak at first.

As he looked away from the test tube, he added “True do you realise that without a glass quarantine, the outbreak of this monstrous virus might devastate our world? Does this fluid just destroy materials or living things too?”

“Keep this confidential. We know too little at present. Maybe I'll learn more tomorrow at work. Thorn, I'm scared, believe me, scared for everyone I know and the rest of mankind.” True confided.

As she used the side of the bath tub as a seat, True added “How this will turn when the military get involved is anybody's guess. Most likely they'll take over the quarantine control and as for trying to stop or cure this virus, no department will be responsible.”

Thorn pondered for a few minutes in silence before suggesting “I reckon it's best we take things into our own hands. We should start now to make a plan of action. Whatever we plan though, it's important to remember we must make sure not to attract attention to ourselves.”

True looked up at her brother and said “Okay. First I'll store this stuff in a safe place. I'll make us a quick snack afterwards. If you want you can go ahead into the living room.”

She placed the test tube in her bathroom cupboard on the wall and proceeded through to the kitchen.

“Do you have any news on Leo? I mean what came of his court case?” she asked as she arrived at the kitchen work-top.

From the living room, having made himself comfortable again on the couch, Thorn called back to his sister “Um, no not yet. I hope he can find a way of getting in touch with us.”

With the mixer blending a fruit shake from a variety of fruit-flavoured powders, she caught that he had said something; but did not catch what.

So she asked “What was that?” raising her voice over the sound of the mixer.

Thorn was sure by the sounds coming from the kitchen, that she may not of heard him and so was ready to repeat his last answer when she asked. At whizzing up snacks True was amazing, considering that most of the delivered shopping was meals to be heated in the microwave oven. Within what had to have been just a few minutes, True arrived with a tray of snacks and drinks; and spread the items on offer over the table top within arm's reach.

Although True had ideas, she first wanted to listen to Thorn. She still needed to attend her hospital shifts for now. She looked at Thorn to prompt the initiative from him.

“True, we need to tackle this with different approaches.” Thorn suggested.

True added “I'm up for that – and what do you reckon they should be?”

Thorn leaned forward and continued “Okay, one angle to consider is that we might have over reacted, and that everything is under control at the hospital and the virus stopped. The other is to assume that matters are far worse, in which case we need to gain more information on the wrist chips; even consider evacuation and our own safety.”

True now raised the ideas she had and said “Yes and I thought it could be useful if I searched for procedures at the hospital for such emergencies. If such a procedure entails notifying the Administration Force, I suggest that we should drop everything and stick to the second approach. And I'll try to get a message to mum and dad out at the pension dome.”

The seriousness of the predicament hit home with Thorn as soon as she mentioned the parents.

Assuming it was now his turn to comment he said “You do that True. I'll contact one of my old breed mates to find out more information on these wrist chips.”

He felt over the skin which covered his chip, then looked at True

and continued “I’ll find out too if we can get rid of ours without sounding alarms.”

Although not with his full approval at first, they had agreed to meet up at Thorn's apartment at seven the next evening. Due to the state of his place True's flat was his choice of location, but she made a good point of not creating a visiting pattern.

## Chapter 9

The tunnel network between the domes got congested around midday. Citizens received ten entertainment and shopping units if they used the lift (capsule) transportation instead. The lift transportation ran through the tunnel network, with the capsules hooked up to a mono-rail parallel to the traffic lane. Over the years most of the tunnels had been expanded in width, but still the investment did not resolve the traffic problem. At least T.T.V's had authority to move through the top deck airspace, above other vehicles in the tunnels.

The T.T.V Commander asked "General, permission to contact hospital platform control for landing zone coordinates?"

"Not yet. You can make contact just before entering the hospital dome's radar zone." Kern confirmed.

As the T.T.V approached the end of the tunnel leading to the hospital dome, the Commander adjusted the controls to prepare for the elevated flight into the dome traffic space. Once in the dome, traffic adhered to the dome driving code, which stated that vehicles were to follow the dome circle clockwise. Once the T.T.V entered the hospital dome, the Commander looked at Kern as if to repeat via telepathy the last order he had received. With the Commander waiting to make radio contact, necessary for permission, Kern gave a nod of his head in approval.

The Commander held the microphone, tuned in the radio to the hospital dome's frequency and said "Hello Hospital Dome Ninety Seven, here is Tee-Tee-Vee Zero One. Request landing permission - Over."

One of the hospital dome control staff gave a prompt reply "Ah, Roger Tee-Tee-Vee Zero One, zone Two Alpha is vacant, acknowledge - Over."

The Commander confirmed the landing zone booking as requested and continued to follow the course calculated by the navigation console. Soon, when they arrived at their destination, the hospital staff may think that the T.T.V was transporting a military casualty and so not expect the General to be on board. Kern wanted to surprise the hospital staff this time and for his other official visits in future.

In control room of Hospital Dome 97, the operator who took the arrival booking now switched on the landing lights for zone 2A. Even during daytime hours this was a routine procedure. Zone 2A now

communicated direct with the T.T.V's navigation console and activated the auto-pilot. The T.T.V crew, including Kern, now prepared to disembark. The vehicle landed to perfection. Although a group of medics waited on the platform, the General and his escorts barged past them, and headed for the control room.

Kern shouted to a medic “You! Make sure the Hospital Director meets me in the control room – Now!”

As Kern entered the control room, first he found a mass of desks and monitors. But as he made a loud entry through the doors, the personnel on shift in the control room stood to acknowledge his presence, authority and rank. After he dumped his peaked hat and gloves on the nearest desk, Kern remained standing and as the Director did not appear; paced around with short steps.

He did not trust the reliability of the medic who he instructed to fetch the Hospital Director and so ordered one of the control room staff “You! Go and find the Director. Tell him I, General Kern, expects his immediate attendance.”

As the man ran through the doorway on his errand, he collided with the Director who ran in the opposite direction towards the control room.

“Sorry, sorry for the delay General Kern. We were not expecting you today as we understood the scheduled visit to be cancelled.” The Director explained.

Kern confirmed to the contrary “Well I am present, now in front of you. Take me to the quarantine ward and explain what happened, and why no report reached my office.”

The Director cursed in silence and wished that communication methods had failed. He took the group to the quarantine ward and begun with his explanation “Well General, a few days ago the first of many patients with the same symptoms arrived. They had their wrist chipped scanned, but not everyone by the same scanner or in the same location. Within a few hours after being scanned the skin above the chip developed a series of enlarged opened pores. Then within a day of these symptoms appearing, a purple fluid substance exited these pores.”

Kern nodded his head and gave the order “Continue.”

“We noticed that except for glass, the fluid drained the matter from material it came into contact with, which left the material in a grey hollow state. We placed the ward under quarantine and collected the

purple fluid in glass containers.” The Director explained.

“So what else happened Director? Have the people recovered? Are others in immediate danger? And what of the substance? Do you have a medical solution?” Kern asked.

The Director gave his reply in a weak tone “According to the checks we ran, the fluid which erupted from the pores did not harm the victims themselves. We avoided direct contact with the fluid. So I am afraid we are not aware whether the virus is harmful to other people or contagious. Upon closer examination in our laboratory we found the fluid to be a living organism. It consumes material matter and grows in mass.”

As they arrived at the ward, the Director called a nurse over and asked for protective suits and masks to be supplied for the visitors. Once they were ready, they entered the ward. Kern went to a bed to inspect the wrist of a victim and saw that the pores had swollen; and were a few centimetres in height. Each pore was full of the purple fluid and looked as though they might erupt at any minute. The General, having a repute of not being a man of patience, called one of his escorts over and asked the man to show he wore protective gloves. As the soldier stretched his hand forward, Kern held the man's arm with one hand and with the other pulled off the glove. Before the soldier had a chance to back away, Kern pushed to soldier's finger onto one of the victim's open pores. As the finger tip became covered in purple fluid, both the victim and the soldier let out a scream.

The Hospital Director, demanding an answer asked “Why did you do that? This is mad and barbaric!” as he tried to calm the victim.

Still holding the soldier's arm, Kern shouted out an order “Arrest the Director!” to which the other escorts reacted and placed the Director in hand-cuffs.

Within seconds Kern took control and continued with giving an order to a nurse “You, sedate the patient and confirm once done.”

The nurse, without words attended to the victim, who whimpered because of the inflicted pain. She went over and took a syringe, needle and small bottle of serum from the ward's supply cupboard. Within seconds the nurse fitted the needle to the syringe and transferred serum from the bottle. The victim fell asleep once sedated, and the nurse looked up at the General; nodding her head in confirmation.

The general, and now the other escorts, continued to watch the soldier's finger. The fluid on the finger formed a drop shape, but did

not soak into the skin. As if able to navigate itself, the purple fluid made a sudden move towards the sleeve of the soldier's suit. Kern let go of the soldier's arm, just in time before the fluid reached the suit material. Within seconds the fluid has saturated the soldier's clothes. As the liquid virus soaked through the material, the clothes lost their substance and the colour. By now the soldier was paralysed due to pure shock. With the fluid nourished it grew in mass and covered him. The soldier met his death by suffocation, under the transparent shell of clothing mummified by the purple layer.

Kern had another instruction for the nurse “Now I want you to take a scalpel and remove the chip from the patient's wrist. Then place the chip into a container and hand it to my Adjutant for deactivation.”

The nurse questioned Kern “But General, can't this wait? I have just sedated the patient.”

“I said Now!” Kern confirmed in a loud tone.

The nurse then made a small slice through the top layers of skin on the victim's wrist. As the chip was not deep under the skin, the nurse could locate the chip and extract it with a pair of surgical pincers. She placed the chip into a small plastic white medical box and handed it the Adjutant. The Adjutant opened the container and used a hand-scanner to deactivate the chip.

Kern instructed an escort to hand the Director over to the hospital security. He then told his men to board the T.T.V. Once on board, Kern gave another order “Seal the door.”

After the vehicle was in the air, the T.T.V Commander asked “Which destination General?”

Kern said “Yes Commander, take the same route we came in on and park once we are in the tunnel. Radio back to headquarters – I want manned Tee-Tee-Vee's at every tunnel leading to this hospital dome. Tell me once the vehicles are in position.”

Once they had reached the tunnel, the Commander obeyed, landed the T.T.V and blocked the traffic going into the dome. Afterwards, the other T.T.V Commanders had called in via radio and confirmed their arrival at the other dome tunnel exits.

As requested, the Commander notified Kern, who gave the order “Every dome exit is to be sealed and under no circumstances is any citizen to be allowed to leave!”

The T.T.V Commander relayed the General's order over the radio to the other T.T.V Commanders and had each of them acknowledge that

they received and understood the message. Each dome exit had a giant steel emergency door, which could stop a fire spreading into or from any tunnel. But after being welded shut was to stay closed forever. Kern arranged for the power supply to the dome to be cut. Everyone involved in this task received a debriefing afterwards, which explained that a deadly virus has spread throughout the dome; with no survivors. That everyone else was safe because of the quick reaction of the W.A.F.

Kern gave further orders for the tunnels leading to the sealed dome, to have traffic signs removed and to be used just for storage. Lift capsule mono-rails were to be cut to separate them from the rest of the network. One order went to the Head of Media to produce a news video, showing the hospital platform being under attack from a virus within the dome. To show scenes of parts of the platform and hospital wards eroded, infected people dying and W.A.F soldiers helping non-infected people board the T.T.V's; and the tunnels being sealed. The video was to be the news broadcast main topic.

As soon as Kern arrived back at the W.A.F headquarters platform, upon being handed the small box containing the chip, he had his Adjutant contact the wrist chip vendor. The supply was top secret and was even above the security level the Adjutant had. The vendor company had a representative office on the W.A.F headquarters platform, which was a sign of how important the business relationship was for the World Administration elite.

Kern, remembering the communication codex both he and the vendor had to adhere to, told the Adjutant "Make sure you speak to the vendor himself. Tell him I invite him to join me at my quarters for dinner at seven this evening. He will understand the short notice."

The Adjutant, being invert, a coward and nervous by nature; could not express his own thoughts and gave the General the assurance he intended to carry out the order in a prompt manner. Even though he fumed because he could not attend due to his lower security level.

Once the Adjutant had left the General's office, Kern took a small pair of pincers and magnifying glass from his laboratory case; which he otherwise used for analysing insects – a secret hobby he allowed himself. With the pincers he took the chip out from the small plastic box and held the magnifying glass over it. What he saw at the hospital did worry him. The chip had eroded from within and was no longer recognisable as it was when in the original condition upon



implantation. It was the erosion which caused the symptoms in the victims, but how the purple fluid, a living organism; came into existence puzzled him – but he had a suspect in mind.

## Chapter 10

As arranged with his sister the evening before, Thorn carried on with his planned tasks. Once he was out in his O.D.S.V for his shift, although he normally started from the spot he left off from at the end of the last shift; this time he went to ground level. He worked along the base panels of the dome. For his lunch period he parked the vehicle near one of the old breed tents, which when out rummaging through the refuse disposal cocoons was used as a shelter. He had not started on his sandwiches before one of the old breed men walked passed and bid him a good day.

Thorn called out and asked “Hey, is Relt around today?”

The man said “Well I haven't seen him this morning yet, but sometimes he comes along to check ejected cocoons for any metals.”

“Okay, thanks. Good day.” Thorn concluded.

Thorn got stuck into his sandwiches with pauses for a drink to swill the munched food. Gazing across the open ground full of rummaged refuse, he saw the unmistakable outline of Relt the smith.

Thorn waved and called out “Relt, Relt!”

Relt looked over having heard his name being called and was sure that the person was one of the non-chevron trade workers. He decided to greet the man who apparently knew him.

Relt called back “Hi, who's that there then?”

As Relt came into view, Thorn said “It's me, Thorn, remember?”

Relt clambered over rubble and shoved large debris aside as he walked over to the worker. As he got to within a few metres he recognised Thorn, the day-dreaming dome repairer who always was good for a chat.

“Well hello Thorn, haven't seen you for a while here on our level – how are you?” Relt asked.

Thorn said “Fine thanks Relt. I'm so glad that our paths crossed today as I need your help and advice.”

Relt was a person people could approach for advice on nearly everything. So Relt was glad to be able to help this newer breed chap, and said “Hey Thorn, certainly! How can I help?”

“Well if you have a spare thirty minutes, hop on board my vehicle and I can explain.” Thorn said.

Relt complied and after wiping his hands along the sides of his trouser legs, stepped up into the O.D.S.V; which was in 'park hover'

gear at fifty centimetres from the ground. Once both were on board, Thorn switched off the vehicle's radio and navigation console which served for tracking purposes too.

“So how can I help you my friend?” asked Relt, sitting on one of the orange passenger seats.

Thorn commenced “Well first let me tell you what has happened so far – then I'll explain how you can maybe help me.”

“Fine by me. Tell me. I do enjoy a story.” said Relt.

“Well, the other evening I called by my sister's place. My sister is a nurse at Hospital Dome Ninety Seven. And while at her place, she showed me a strange purple fluid she had sneaked out from work. Even more strange is that this stuff was a result of what started as a skin rash on victims' wrists above the chip implant. After the victims arrived at hospital, the rash turned into enlarged pores, craters from which this fluid oozed. This fluid is a living organism and grew as it nourished itself on any material other than glass. Another thing is that my sister said that the fluid didn't harm the victims' bodies. But she wasn't sure if the fluid was infectious.” Thorn explained.

Relt listened and his expression gave away that this news did not come as a complete surprise.

He asked “Thorn, tell me now how you think that I can be of help. Afterwards it could be that I have information for you.”

Thorn continued as asked “We decided that to tackle this problem by different approaches was best. My sister was to attend work and note which procedure they had adopted. If the staff informed the Administration Force, mine was to be followed. And she intended to try to get a message to our parents in the pension dome. My approach being to seek you out as you might help us get information relating to the wrist chips and their production. And second, as we don't know what the cause of the problem is, to search for a method of removing our chips without sounding an alarm.”

Relt commented “Okay Thorn. Please listen because what I tell you now isn't that glamorous I'm afraid... but it's the truth at least. I'll start with the wrist chips. Back during the dome network construction, and the Administration Centres were cleansing the old worldwide civilisation; the registration for newer breed citizenship began - no offence meant there mate. Those selected had to undergo a wrist chip implant procedure. So there was more pressure placed on the World Administration as they wanted to control the public by chip with no

exceptions. But at the time they didn't have adequate resources for production as establishing the global dome network had the highest priority for their labour employees. A chip vendor company announced their product, available in adequate quantities ready for issue. I am sure you can imagine how this supply was the best choice for them. The product so convenient and low cost that the credibility of the vendor became irrelevant. The company even showed how discreet they were by ensuring that production and storage took place underground with tight security. In reality there was no test phase within the Administration Centres for the chip implants. As for the vending company personnel, there's more to tell you later.”

Thorn passed his water bottle over to Relt.

After drinking water, Relt proceeded “And now I want to tell you what I know of the pension dome. It hurts me to have to tell you it does not exist. I'm sorry Thorn, but did you ever ask yourself why you'd never seen a colleague after they retired; or sighted anyone sixty years or older anywhere within the World Administration network? On every newer breed's sixtieth birthday a card is sent from the World Administration and it's saturated with poison and perfume scented. The World Administration staff intercepted your messages sent to your parents. For the incoming calls they use voice synchronisation software, having recorded your parents voices upon arrival. Again mate, I'm so sorry.”

Thorn felt as though he had just received a punch to the stomach. His walls of reality just crumbled around him. Pictures of his mother and father ran through his mind in old film format. He prayed that their last moments were together, that death was quick, and that neither had to watch the other go. His thoughts focused on True, *'how should I tell her what happened to our parents?'*

Relt gave Thorn a reassuring light pat on the shoulder and asked “Are you fine for me to continue?”

Thorn wiped his tears away and after sniffing through his nostrils said “Ah, yeah Relt, I'm fine – please continue.”

“I have good news to do with the wrist chip though. For our trading relationships with your breed we had to find a solution for the couriers getting in and out of the refuse disposal tubes. Through our newer breed trade contacts we got a copy of the blueprint for the deactivation scanners and from that built one ourselves. If we were to deactivate too many wrist chips the wrong people may get suspicious, but a few

is okay. As you can't stray that far away from the dome perimeter, if you wait I'll get our scanner. And once your chip is deactivated we can extract it for you. The same goes for your sister. Anyone else? Brother or sister?" Relt asked.

"Thanks Relt, I was sure I could count on you. Apart from my sister, I have an older brother Leopold or 'Leo' as I call him. But he was up in front of a military court not too long ago, charged for conspiring against the World Administration, and we haven't heard from him since then." Thorn explained.

Relt stood up and walked over to the vehicle hatch. Upon leaving Thorn's vehicle he said "Don't you go anywhere now Thorn. I'll go and get the scanner and return in half an hour."

Thorn gave Relt a wave of his hand and said "Thanks again Relt. In the meantime, I'll pretend that I'm busy on a task – I'm good at that!" with a smirk on his face.

Jumping in the driver's seat, Thorn started the vehicle and parked it again fifty metres further on around the dome; to give the vehicle's work protocol something to record. He left the vehicle and started with sealing a panel, which was not in need of repair.

The thirty minutes went by fast and to the minute Relt had kept his word. As he saw Relt returning, it alarmed Thorn to see a stranger with him. As the only defensive precaution available, Thorn disappeared in through his vehicle hatch and locked it. He then watched the approaching men through the safety of his wind screen. Thorn found it strange that that the other man looked somewhat familiar to him. As they came closer to the vehicle he laughed and cursed himself for being so stupid – how could he not recognise his own brother? Thorn opened the hatch and gave Leo a strong hug as he entered the vehicle. Relt came in behind Leo.

Although Leo did not need an introduction, Relt explained "Leo joined our settlement after being escorted out of the dome network. Oh, please excuse Leo's attire. Since joining us he has been part of our hunting group. I had sighted them returning from the hunt."

Relieved knowing his brother was fine, Thorn said "Nothing better could have happened as him joining your settlement, Relt."

Relt blushed and said "Okay Thorn, let's sort out your chip. Leo, you can help too. Can you first take hold of this bottle and scalpel?"

Leo took the small bottle of anaesthetic fluid and the still-sterile blue handled scalpel. He held the items ready for use and watched

Relt.

Relt took Thorn's hand, pushing the shirt sleeve up to expose the skin covering the chip. He then scanned the skin and placed the machine back in his large jacket pocket once done. He called to Leo "Now give me the bottle please."

Leo passed him the bottle. Relt took a clean cloth from his top left jacket pocket, opened the bottle and dipped in the cloth.

Once the cloth soaked up the liquid, he rubbed it over the skin on Thorn's wrist and said "Wait a few minutes and let me know once it's numb."

After a few minutes had passed, Thorn looked at Relt and confirmed "Yep, numb and swollen now." and tapped his opposite wrist with his left-hand forefinger.

To relax the somewhat tense atmosphere in the vehicle, Relt spoke to the others and said "So how did the hunt go today Leo?"

Leo explained "Well the traps we left out yesterday caught a few rabbits. But early this morning we spotted and gave chase to a wild pig – using the tactic of two groups; one went ahead, and the other continued chase until we had it surrounded."

Relt reminded Leo "Remember necessity? Be grateful for what you catch and always remember that we kill game just for our basic needs."

Leo had been listening even though he was out of place with regards the talking theme of hunting. Thorn felt a slight tug on his arm and as he looked seen that the surgical task had taken place. And that Relt had applied a bandage around his wrist. As the chip position was not deep under the skin, extraction was possible with hardly any bleeding.

"There you go mate – finished. I'll get this chip dismantled, if you don't mind Thorn, to look at what we can discover connected to the virus outbreak." Relt said after rubbing the chip clean with a cloth to hold up for inspection by the trio.

Relieved, now to be wrist chip free, Thorn consented "Sure, take the horrible thing with you. I'll head back to the depot and liaise with True this evening. I think it best for True and myself to exit the accommodation dome through a refuse disposal tube. Relt, could you organise a rescue team to be outside waiting? True's chip needs to be deactivated before we travel any further outside though."

Relt said "Sure thing. As you'll be escaping through the refuse disposal tube, the newer breed have no reason to suspect a group of old

breed rummaging through the ejected cocoons. We'll rig up one of our tents, so we can remove your sister's chip as soon as possible. We'll do patrols, disguised as foragers, to find the tube from which you'll exit. I'll arrange for a change of clothing for you both. For the sake of your own safety you'd want to blend in as part of the old breed population.”

Looking at Leo, Relt grinned and continued “I suppose that I can count on you wanting to be part of the 'Rescue' team for your brother and sister?”

Leo was quick to reply with “You bet I do!”

“Great, that's settled. Leo, let's move out now so that Thorn can start out on his return journey.” Relt said as he stood up to leave the vehicle.

Leo stood up upon Relt's instruction, gave Thorn a brotherly hug and followed Relt out of the vehicle. Within minutes Thorn called them back.

As they arrived back at the vehicle Relt asked “Problem?”

Thorn explained “Damn, I'm afraid so – without the wrist chip I can't start this block of metal they call a vehicle!”

Leo smiled and as they both climbed back on board said “Relt, give me the chip for a moment.”

Relt handed Leo the chip he had extracted from Thorn's wrist earlier.

Leo continued to explain “One thing soldiers are shown in training is how to start a W.A.F vehicle in an emergency. And so I'm sure that the same trick will work for your vehicle Thorn.”

Leo passed Thorn the chip and said “Now hold the chip over the ignition censor.”

Thorn did as Leo asked and held the chip over the ignition censor on the central dashboard. The vehicle motor then gave off the expected sound of the metal turbine starting.

“Now switch on the auto-pilot please.” said Leo

As Thorn flicked the auto-pilot switch on the left-hand dashboard, Leo leaned over his shoulder and thumped the dashboard just below the auto-pilot switch with his fist. Both Relt and Thorn looked bewildered at Leo as if to say 'Well we could have done that too!'

Leo saw they wanted an explanation, so he pointed at the dashboard and said “The auto-pilot memory card is behind the left dashboard, below the auto-pilot switch. When I hit the dashboard, the memory card should have carried out a check and made a running backup;

which I hope contained the chip identification code and data. Thorn, you should now be able to use the auto-pilot switch for ignition – switch off the auto-pilot, stop the engine now and try it.”

Thorn then switched the auto-pilot off and hit the shut-off button. The memory card needed a few minutes to run the program command, but followed it and started the vehicle motor.

Leo added “You now just need to let the auto-pilot drive – but I gather you'll not be using the vehicle that much longer!”

Once both Leo and Relt had left the vehicle again and had shut the hatch, Thorn entered the return route coordinates into the navigation console. He could return to the depot after his shift, park up and be home to tidy up before True arrived. As he arrived back at the depot, Thorn noticed that a group of two-chevron trade colleagues had gathered around the main office. Thorn thought that the occurrence was strange as most of them did not hang around at work for long once their shifts had finished. After parking his vehicle, he first went into the office to hand in his vehicle keys and clock out with his employee card.

When he came out the office he commented “Is it my birthday? I'll take the presents now thank you!”

Thorn's colleagues looked at him, but none had smiles on their faces. One colleague, who was leading the conversation among the men, stepped towards Thorn and said “Haven't you heard yet what happened at the hospital dome?”

Thinking of his sister True, Thorn said “Um no. Why, what's up with it?”

The man explained “Well, it's been the talk everywhere today. Every tunnel leading to Hospital Dome Ninety Seven is closed. Doesn't your sister work there?”

Thorn said “Strange, maybe it's due to construction work in the tunnels? Yep, my sister works there, but she'd have called me if something was up at work.”

Another voice from within the group spoke “But not if she couldn't leave! I reckon they may not evacuate everyone out of that dome in an emergency.”

Thorn reassured the group “Well, in an emergency who knows what can happen. But it sounds as though it's a routine maintenance measure. There might be gas pipes that need to be repaired, which made sense to close the tunnels to the public.”



He left the group to continue discussing their theories further. Thorn walked to an elevator capsule in a casual manner and upon opening it, walked in and closed the door. The navigation console received the instruction to take him home. He decided not to check his email and instead to place an order for a large dinner, intending for the food to be enough for both his sister and himself. He knew that ordering meals could raise suspicion if they were under observation. Using the same console in the capsule, he placed an order for beans, ham and mashed potato; baguette, salad and cake as dessert.

By quarter to six in the evening Thorn arrived back at home, carried out blitz cleaning of the apartment and took delivery of the evening meal. True was to arrive at seven on the dot and with the elevator network it was possible to instruct the navigation console for a destination time of arrival. He prepared the table for them both and unpacked the delivered meal. Thinking back at what the work group were talking over earlier, he hoped that True got out without being kept in quarantine or even worst, arrested. Thorn checked his watch every few minutes, now that True's scheduled arrival time had passed and there was no sign of his sister.

At first he thought that the delay may have been due to the dome closure, resulting in the traffic jams within the elevator network. But after one hour scrapped that theory. Thorn had not touched the food and lost his appetite. Now growing even more concerned by the minute, Thorn used the elevator to get as close as possible to the hospital dome to try to find his sister. Just in case, he left a message for her on the apartment door and sent an email to her explaining what he had done.

## Chapter 11

It had been a long day and the age of fifty Kern was no longer used to such action-filled days. At least not since his commission and promotion to General of the W.A.F. But his duties continued and the next event was the one he hated the most. Soon the vendor was to arrive for the pre-arranged meeting. If any person ever possessed everything Kern hated, it was the wrist chip vendor. And the vendor's race was an issue for Kern.

To prepare for the meeting as he knew well that the vendor always accepted his invitations to dinner; he had to make use of low-esteem and discreet connections for catering. At least those high within the World Administration elite tolerated these connections as a negotiation measure. The vendor was not to arrive by elevator capsule, instead he made use of another elevator installed within this one platform. Kern watched the entrance alarm screen, waiting for when the black-haired vendor approached the General's living quarters. Upon the door bell ringing, he opened the door for his guest. Why the vendor always wore a black hooded cloak he did not know as it might attract more attention if seen by others elsewhere.

As the vendor entered his quarters, Kern greeted him with “Good evening Lars.”

The vendor snapped a reply in an irritated tone “Not 'Lars', 'La', I mean 'Lar', wait!” and pulled a green oval device from his cloak pocket. He pressed the round black button above the control dial.

Kern forgot that the vendor used the device as soon as he was out of the public eye. The button on the device deactivated the human cloaking and showed his original reptilian form. The main body covered in grey-yellow scales; with grey, sometimes black ones over his back and sides. The General winced from the vile sight and damp-rotten smell of this creature. As the vendor morphed back to reptilian form, Kern took a while to get accustomed to meeting with a species his brain did not register as a terrestrial being. Although Kern was not a small person, this reptilian now towered over him. He found it amazing just how such a muscle-bound creature could move with elegance, unlike the clumsy and primitive reptilian sub-species used as soldiers.

The vendor continued to speak, but now in his own non-obstructed dialect “Kern, we reptilians are ssensitive when it comess our given

names! It is 'Larsst'."

Kern reacted sharp, wanting to avoid angering his guest in any form and said "I'm sorry, yes a name is important I must admit."

He attempted the vendor's name again, remembering to make a hissing sound with the 'ss' and wait before ending the name with a 'tut' sound for the 't'; said "Larsst."

Larsst nodded his scaled head to show Kern's effort pleased him. For the few humans who may have had any doings with reptilians, they saw them eating just a variety of bugs and insects. The reptilians wanted humans to see them eating this dietary. It hid the truth as they had an appetite for human organs – but such meals are treated as a delicatessen and getting stock remained discreet. The news covered regular reports on people who had gone missing and never found. Kern always ensured that his dinner guest had no cause for complaint and gestured with an open arm, pointing to the dining table and spread of shiny human body organs.

Larsst now made a purring sound from his throat as he went to the table and impaled his chosen meal with his claws. Before eating, he first took his time with smelling the pieces of organ. With a slight grin and movement of his drooling forked tongue, Larsst signalled his delight with what his dinner host offered. Kern recalled that reptilians deemed it most impertinent to be disturbed during a meal. He poured himself a drink and waited for his guest to finish his disgusting eating ritual – one which he wished not to watch. After Larsst had finished licking his claws clean with his tongue, Kern now proceeded with the conversation. Because unlike fellow human guests, with reptilians the niceties such as asking if the meal had met expectations could be spared.

Kern asked "Larsst, are you aware of any side-effects caused by the wrist chip implants?"

The General could never tell any reptilian facial signs of emotion, which was possible with humans. He found conversations with reptilians difficult due to the required patience, which was not one of his strengths. He knew though, that by nature they are cunning; and so he hoped his art of communication skills served him well today.

After five minutes Larsst said "Sorry, nothing negative showed when we tested. Is something wrong with the chips we supply?"

Careful not to insult his guest over the product his company supplied, Kern explained "No, no, the chips are fine. It is just that we

received a report that hospital patients complained of a rash which later enlarged pores around the part of skin above the implanted wrist chip.”

After a short pause, Larsst said “You now our chipss are produced under exsxtreme control. Sstandardss are of the highesst quality. The contract iss to ssupply wrisst chipss – which we do. We cannot be held resspponsible for problemss after chip implantation. Do you undersstand Kern? Did you exsstract a chip for me to insspect?”

“Yes.” Kern confirmed and opening the box containing the chip he continued “I have a chip which we extracted from a patient. I took the precaution to seal the hospital dome for quarantine measures.”

And in a sorrowful tone added “I hope no other cases are reported elsewhere within the dome network.”

Larsst's slit olive coloured eyes widened, and his tongue was visible again and slithered from side to side; as he inspected the chip and listened to Kern. The reptilian race had always seen humans as being of lower esteem and serving either the purpose as servant or food source.

Larsst commented “Of coursse concernss of humans are also concernss of ourss. I will have the chip analyssed. May I offer to organisse the... um... cleanssing of the hosspital dome – of coursse we rissk infection oursselves, but may develop the chip technology further for detecting ssuch illnessess.”

Kern guessed that Larsst seen the sealed dome as a food source. But as it solved a problem he might otherwise have to tackle again, he consented. And contemplated his reply before speaking “Larsst, we appreciate the kind offer to cleanse Hospital Dome Ninety Seven.”

With reptilians not being known as a sociable species, it came as no surprise to Kern that Larsst wasted no time in thanking him for the splendid meal. Reptilians meant such pleasantries in a sarcastic sense, due to them classing themselves as the most elite species and never grateful to humans. Larsst extracted the morphing device from his cloak pocket and as he turned the dial, his reptilian shape shifted; and within minutes left Kern's quarters as the black-haired man who had arrived earlier that evening.

He filled his glass again with whiskey and went over and slouched on his soft blue couch. Considering the reptilian's offer, he reckoned that things had turned out well. The hospital dome was soon to be cleared of citizens and he expected that entry to the dome came from

an underground reptilian network. At last one negative thought sprang to mind, the threat the virus posed - that the same might spread elsewhere. But although he had not found a solution to the virus problem, his suspicion may soon be confirmed.

He thought to himself *'The reptilians may be more involved in this catastrophe as just being the wrist chip supplier. Larsst did not look surprised as he saw the state of the extracted chip even though he defended the high standard of the product. When volunteering to help with the cleansing of the hospital dome, he was not that concerned that the infective virus may be harmful to the reptilian race'*. For now though Kern intended to wait and repeat today's procedure for the next hospital if needed. He was sure he could receive reptilian help again if required.

Once Larsst had entered the elevator, which could be opened by a special key held by elite reptilians who had direct dealings with the World Administration; he closed the door and selected one of the underground levels. As the elevator descended, he let out a triumphant laugh. Upon reaching the selected level, the elevator stopped, and the door opened. He proceeded to the office of his senior to make his report. In the reptilian world rank came with seniority, except under special circumstances where promotions might be earned. Even though he was one hundred and thirty human years old and a member of many Boards and Councils, Larsst was still a reptilian youngster. And many others being his senior and so of higher rank and social status. Although one could not be so disrespectful as to ask a senior reptilian its age, Larsst reckoned the most ancient reptilians must be over five hundred human years.

As reptilians are not controlled by the time dimension as humans are, years are marked by thickness of scales. So they did not make calendar notes for birthday celebrations. Unlike a human's office, those senior reptilians in positions of authority who owned offices, had them made to reptilian liking. The design of such an office was enough to make a human guest, if reptilians had any, most uncomfortable.

A reptilian's office was a hollow den, always underground and part of a network. The floor dry and if possible sandy. Parts of the office had groups of rocks piled on the floor and sometimes thick roots sprouting from the walls, from trees that once lived, and everywhere dark and damp. This provided the ideal working conditions for a senior reptilian – who spent much time in the lair of an office. Throughout

most of the reptilian tunnel network was dim lighting – a perk they allowed themselves, compliments of the human World Administration. The senior sensed Larsst's arrival at his office and waved him in as he appeared at the entrance.

Once Larsst was through the entrance, as reptilian offices had no doors, slouching against his favourite pile of smooth rocks the senior asked “What do you have to report?”

Larsst explained “Excellency, I report that my plan to deploy the viruss via human wrisst chipss hass worked and the outbreak commenced. Ass we tessted before, the chemical reaction within the wrisst chipss releassed the fluid through the humans' sskin pores. The human World Adminisstration Forcee have ssealed off one of the hosspital domess, containing patientss and sstaff, and accepted my offer for uss to cleansse it for them. I resspectfully assk my sseniorss to accept thiss hunting game ass a token of my resspect.”

“Larsst issn't it?” the senior asked while inspecting his own thick greyish 'hand' claws.

He confirmed “Yess, Excellency. Larsst iss my name.”

Delighted, the senior said “Larsst, you sshall be rewarded for contributing to the risse of our race, rightful ownerss of Earth. I will ssend a hunting group to the hosspital dome. I want you to be present and coordinate.”

Larsst, glad to have pleased his senior added “It iss Hosspital Dome Ninety Sseven. It iss an honour to be assigned ssuch resspanssibility from his excellency.”

## Chapter 12

As soon as he sat in the blue metal elevator capsule, Thorn instructed the navigation console to take course for the hospital dome. He had with him a black rucksack in which he packed provisions, including a full water bottle and a small blanket. He had taken his work belt too, from which the battery powered an attached torch, screwdriver and metal cutter. This was the first time an elevator journey took him to a possible unknown destination. As the elevator approached a tunnel leading to the hospital dome, it hooked onto the mono-rail above which transported the capsule through the tunnel.

At least the mono-rail was still working even with the closed dome at the end of the tunnel. His capsule came to an abrupt stand-still as it collided with something solid. Thrown from his seat, after he regained orientation he noticed how his ears rang from the sound of the crash. Thorn thought that the capsule hit the dome's seal, but realised that the normal journey through the tunnel was twice as long. He tried to open the capsule door but forgot that was first possible once the capsule reached the destination.

After giving thought to the problem, an idea came to Thorn. He was now proud of himself, considering the current sequence of events and having decided earlier to bring his work belt with him. He could now use the cutter to cut around the door frame of the capsule. The battery always re-charged itself whenever Thorn was near or within a dome network. So it could cope with the challenge of cutting through the metal oval shell of the elevator capsule. On the side of the cutter was a sheath, that contained a pair of protective goggles, which he now opened and placed the goggles around his head.

He began with cutting through the metal side panel. The loud grinding noise within the capsule was unbearable to the ear as the cutting disc sliced through metal. The sparks ricocheted around the inside of the capsule, many dowsing out on his skin and clothes. As he cut through the last few centimetres of metal he kicked the middle of the cut metal panel, which forced the rough-edged plate outwards and drop one metre; before stopping with a few loud clang noises on the concrete tunnel floor. Thorn sprang out of the capsule to make sure that he landed on his feet.

The only lighting in the tunnel came from the lights fitted underneath the capsules. But they provided enough light for him to

see. For a strange reason though the tunnel was now a long storage room, as there was stacks of barrels, boxes and containers. Looking ahead into the distance, Thorn now knew what his capsule had hit into – it was other elevator capsules. Looking left, he saw another queue of capsules parked facing the opposite direction. Something blocked the flow of capsules on mono-rail network in both directions.

Thorn walked along the painted black and yellow striped hazard line on the ground and tapped the sides of the capsules with the nozzle of his cutter. He listened for signs of anyone else who may be stuck in the capsules in which they had been travelling. As he proceeded along the line he heard nothing and so guessed that each of the capsules must have been returning empty to one of the elevator network depots; after it delivered the passengers. When he tapped the last few, a yell came from the one closest to him, which judging from the outer shell of the capsule had returned from the hospital dome. As a health measure, capsules arriving at any hospital dome went through a sterilization wash.

He called back “Wait! Stay away from the capsule door and make sure that ears and eyes are covered – I'll cut out a doorway for you.”

“Okay” he understood, noticing this it was a female's voice. Thorn pulled out the cutter, put his protective goggles on and cut around the capsule door. Once finished he explained to the passenger she should now kick the door open. As instructed, she kicked the door out from the side of the capsule. After the cut metal chunk from the capsule crash-landed on the floor, Thorn went over to the capsule to help the passenger to the ground. As she came to the doorway he could tell by the uniform she was a nurse, one of True's colleagues; but he knew none of them by name.

Now she was out of the capsule he introduced himself “Hi, I'm Thorn. I'm searching for my sister. She is a nurse too. Trudy is her name, 'True' to friends and family.”

“Thanks for getting me out. I thought I'd never escape – I was in there for what must have been hours. By the way my name is Jessica. I couldn't even email anybody as the service was unavailable in the tunnel.”

Thorn added “That may explain why True didn't answer my email. I'm concerned because True and I had arranged for her to be at my place at seven. She didn't turn up, which was unusual for her.”

Jessica, waving her blond hair back in shape with a shake of her



head, said “Yes, I know True well. We've shared a shift many a time. If it's any help to you, I seen her early this morning; but wasn't on her shift and so I'm not sure when she left.”

“Thanks Jessica – I'm grateful for any information I can get at the moment.” Thorn said as he packed the cutter and goggles away.

“Hey, pleasure to help. I suppose I'd better not delay you any longer. Thanks again for the rescue.” Jessica said.

She now seated herself on one of the storage boxes, looking around as if waiting for another form of public transport to arrive.

He reflected back to when he met with Leo and Relt. And considering the current threat said “Jessica, I don't reckon an emergency transport solution will be in place soon to replace the elevator capsules. Now I sure cannot guarantee that the route ahead of me, searching for my sister, will lead to any form of transport; but you're welcome to come with me.”

Although Jessica did not let on, to date she led a secluded life; which was more or less the main reason she became a nurse. As a nurse she concentrated on her job, spent many extra hours at work and regularly volunteered for double shifts. During her time off she stayed at home most of the time, and from the comfort of her couch placed orders for meals and shopping. She had no friends nor living relatives who she could visit. So Jessica was glad to receive an invitation to go somewhere, even though it was from a complete stranger, under unusual circumstances, with an unclear destination and possibly dangerous journey.

“Well I've nothing planned, and if I might be of help with your search, at least I'd have re-paid you the favour; for getting me out of the capsule. So yeah! Thanks, I'll come with you.” Jessica said in a spontaneous reply.

With that decided, Thorn first offered Jessica a drink from his water bottle, took out his torch and pulled the headband out from the side. Now with Thorn wearing the torch with headband, they both carried on along the tunnel following the line of mono-rail. As they walked, he wanted tell her of the virus, but did not wish to trouble her. Close to the end of the tunnel the air felt unusual, damp and smelt stale; and Jessica thought she heard people's voices.

She said “Thorn Stop. Stand still. Don't talk, just listen.”

Thorn not receiving such audio waves himself did as she asked.

“Listen. Again! And again! It sounds as though people are

screaming for help.” Jessica whispered.

Thorn had to admit “No, sorry nothing.” and continued to move forward.

They now walked in silence to pinpoint, if the voices called out again, from which location they came. The air become even more damp and fowl smelling as if it had escaped from a sewage pipe. Gagging for fresh air, which was not available, Jessica opened her rucksack and pulled a pair of surgical masks and handed one to Thorn.

*'An excellent idea'* Thorn thought *'As the virus may spread by air.'*

The tunnel end came into sight. This time it was Thorn who caught the voices first. And understood “Help!” “Let us out please!” “Stop them!” “Stop the biting, killing!” “Have mercy!”

Thorn took a few steps back and looked at Jessica. He said “I heard the voices too this time. Did you catch what they shouted?”

“Not everything, no. I deciphered calls for help and wanting to leave the dome.” she said.

He was glad she did not catch the last part, claims of being eaten by something. Thorn remembered the fluid they examined and reckoned the people on the other side of the seal may have meant a virus attack.

“Okay Jessica, my cutter still has enough power to slice a small doorway through that seal. Before I start though, I still think that we should defend ourselves just in case; as they're distressed enough.” Thorn explained.

In agreement, Jessica said “Yes, good point. If you get the cutter ready, I'll check those storage boxes on the other side for something suitable as a make-do weapon.”

Thorn nodded his head in consent and prepared the cutter and donned the protective goggles. Jessica walked over to the pile of black plastic storage boxes. Upon closer inspection, she found that the boxes had no locks and so she could remove the lids with ease. Without emptying the contents, she held each box stable with one hand and stuck her other arm in and combed through the contents; discarding soft materials and extracting items which might serve as a weapon. Still not having found any item that even neared being a weapon, she finished checking the last box from the pile. Disappointed, she returned empty handed.

“Sorry Thorn, but those boxes contained nothing of use.” She explained.

Thorn searched as if in hope to find a weapon secured on one of the

tunnel walls. As he looked left, his eyes stopped on a cupboard embedded in the wall, with large black printed letters on it, which read 'W.A.F ONLY'.

He suggested "Jessica, let's look in the cupboard on that wall."

They both went over to the grey steel wall cupboard.

Jessica arrived first, tried the door and confirmed "Locked! I thought so."

Thorn said "Stand back." and once she was out of the immediate proximity, used the cutter to remove the lock bolt.

Jessica opened the cupboard door, taking care not to touch the cut spot, which was still hot. Upon inspection, she had no idea how to use the items inside, but she knew that they must be a form of weapon used by the World Administration Force; as she had seen soldiers carrying them.

Each weapon hung from a rack in the cupboard, and she wanted to take one for each of them; when Thorn said "We'll take every one of them, just in case."

Although she did not know why they should need more spare weapons, Jessica took them as Thorn suggested. She handed one to Thorn and slung the spare ones over her shoulder by the slings. Thorn, as if a boy in a toy shop, inspected the weapon. It was fifty centimetres long, coloured dark blue, and made from steel. The weapon had a trigger, pistol-grip, chamber, butt, rear and foresight, chamber and barrel; and was unlike of any other personal weapon he had seen.

At the front-end of the barrel was a small pin-hole. To test, Thorn pointed his weapon at a space on the wall and fired. A small stream of liquid fired out and splashed against the wall, but nothing else happened. Puzzled, he lowered the weapon, looked at Jessica and shrugged his shoulders. Thorn went over to the wall and touched the damp patch which had formed as soon as the liquid had soaked into the concrete. He held his finger under of his nostrils to smell. Within seconds his eyes stung, the lids shut in reflex and his nose blocked air intake.

Jessica grinned and said "Liquid pepper spray!"

After he rubbed his eyes, Thorn said "Just what we need now, should the circumstances demand such defence measures."

Thorn looked at Jessica who, even with three weapons now on her person, still had an innocent expression. '*Should I be taking her with me into peril?*' he thought to himself. Thorn considered what might

happen to her if she remained behind and gave the answer to his own question with 'Yes I am'.

With the cutter from its sheath, and goggles over his eyes, he switched the machine on and began to cut a doorway in the tunnel seal. As he continued to cut, Jessica had a weapon aimed over his shoulder to give him cover; even though if she asked herself if she was confident enough to use the weapon on someone – the answer was 'No'.

As Thorn cut through the second part of the make-shift doorway, although the noise from the cutter munching up metal was loud; both Jessica and Thorn still heard the hysterical screams coming from within the hospital dome. Thorn cut through the last thirty centimetres of metal as the shear pressure from the people on the other side bent the metal door as if on a hinge. With his nostrils full of the stench of burnt metal, and unable to view much beyond the door through his protective goggles; Thorn, not prepared for what came next, could not have stopped the mass of people bursting through the doorway.

As the door snapped open it pushed Thorn back. Coming out from complete darkness, the people became dazzled even though lighting was of low brightness. Jessica made use of the moment and squirted liquid pepper spray at the faces of the first ones who came through the doorway.

Thorn shouted to Jessica “Stop spraying them. Save the weapons for whatever is chasing these people.”

Jessica ran over and helped Thorn to his feet. They could just stand back and watch as hundreds of people squeezed through the doorway Thorn had cut. As these people escaped the dome, they continued screaming as they ran out through the tunnel. Each person who came through the doorway, had been losing blood. Many had large bite-shaped wounds and a few of them even missing finger digits or complete limbs. Out of fear, everyone escaping the dome looked back as they left – scared that they might still be followed by something.

Once the doorway was free of those escaping, Thorn looked at Jessica and said “You know that you have time to go back if you wish?”

She looked back at Thorn and said with a small grin “Well I've still got nothing planned.”

With the weapons pointing to the front, Jessica and Thorn moved through the doorway into the dome. Apart from the immediate

proximity which Thorn's torch light covered, everywhere else was in complete darkness. The dome floor was soft and Thorn realised that although he had expected concrete flooring as in the tunnel, it was of sandy dry earth. Within minutes, they both sensed movement to the side, somewhere in the shadows. The stink now gagged them through the surgical face masks.

Although not being military trained, Thorn's reflex was fast, now that adrenalin flowed. And having sensed the movement, he turned his head to shine the torch light in that direction. Jessica looked in the same direction. Thorn then found the source of the horrible rotting stench. His front view was full of the scaled chest of a creature he never guessed existed. He gave the beast a quick look-over from the clawed feet up to the head, not believing what now confronted him.

This green beast's body was bulging with over-dimensional muscle, and Thorn reckoned that the thing must have been at least three metres high. At this point another vial stench of body odour mixed with the general smell of rotting substances surrounded where they stood. On top of the creature's skull, the scales formed a horn point in the centre.

Thorn's sub-conscious tried to convince him that it was a crocodile, but the more he looked at the face; the more he was unable place this thing into any animal category.

Most confusing was the yellow slit eyes positioned in the face front akin to a human, and although it just had nostrils, had scaled lips. Judging from the mixed attire of rag clothing and armour and holding up a club as weapon; Thorn guessed that they came from a pre-history era. He reminded himself that the newer breed's history just went back to the war and establishment of the World Administration. Next to this beast appeared another one, and behind that one even more movement. The blood-ridden trickling drool from the reptilians' scaled mouths took him to the verge of vomiting.

Thorn assumed that the creatures had no grasp of the English language and shouted to Jessica "We're surrounded by these crocs or whatever they are. If they move closer give them a dose of pepper spray."

Jessica gulped, as she returned from the shock of being confronted by beings not of this world, and shouted back "Um, Okay."

To the pair's surprise a reptilian, the one Thorn had spotted first; spoke up and said in a deep rough voice as it licked the blood from jagged pointed teeth "Do you humans think that you can stop us?"

Thorn did not answer and instead released a direct dose of pepper spray at the talking reptilian's face. At least expecting a small level of protection from the weapon, the disappointment could be seen in the humans' facial expressions; as the reptilian did not notice the liquid landing on the hard scaled face. Now panicking, Thorn called to Jessica "Follow me, as quick as you can!" and ran off to the left along the base of the dome.

At that instant he had no idea how quick the reptilians could run and how close they had been behind him. He noted that the tugging on his jacket was Jessica though, just keeping a hold of him. As he kept on running, he stopped himself falling over a set of stairs leading to a storage bunker. Thorn remembered from the step pattern, that they led to a storage room containing stock of panel sealing compound and other materials and equipment.

He found his bearings fast and descended the steps together with Jessica. At the bottom of the concrete stairs, Jessica gave a sigh of relief as Thorn pulled out a white plastic key card from his jacket pocket which opened the door. They entered the storage room and locked the door behind them.

Thorn opened his rucksack and handed Jessica his water bottle again, from which she took a few large gulps. As she handed back the bottle, he drank from it himself. They both wanted to ask each other what creatures did they confront out in the dome, but neither of them had answers. So they remained seated in silence for a few minutes, catching breath back.

Thorn asked "Jessica, you saw that the liquid pepper spray didn't harm them?"

"You bet I saw it!" she said.

Thorn continued "Okay, well we have one other chance as no doubt they're now queued on the other side of that door; just waiting for us to run into the trap. First we need to empty the weapons over in the corner so we don't get dosed with pepper spray ourselves. I have an idea."

Jessica obeyed and released the liquid by keeping the weapon trigger pressed. Thorn joined in and helped do the same with the spare weapons. He prised open an industrial barrel of grey panel sealing compound used for the outer dome repairs. And poured in transparent thinning liquid from a huge canister and closed the lid of the barrel as quick as possible.

Thorn explained “Okay, I hope to find a method for filling up these weapons when they're empty.” as he examined the weapon.

Jessica added “Look at this Thorn. That knob behind the rear-sight can be pulled back – I suppose that it works as a syringe does, sucking in any liquid form.”

“Great!” said Thorn and continued “My idea is that we fill the weapons with the sealant stuff. When you shoot it from your weapon, aim for their eyes and nostrils – this stuff will go solid within seconds as soon as it comes into contact with the air.”

After they had filled the weapons, Thorn searched the storage room again, and this time found something. He held a load of glass test tubes, and a metal test tube holder between his left arm and chest and carried them over to the sealant barrel. As he looked at Jessica, Thorn explained that the tubes used to be used for testing the various compound mixtures made.

He added “I'll fill these tubes up with the same stuff we have loaded in our weapons. We can throw them at the crocs' heads if out of shooting range.”

Jessica gave a nod of her head in agreement and commented “Good idea! If those beasts are right outside though, we need to get passed them!”

Thorn uncorked test tubes and filling them with sealant said “My idea was to let them come in, instead of us trying to leave, at first.”

Shocked, she said “What? You're not serious are you? I know that our survival chances are low, but I'm not up for a suicide mission!”

Thorn said “No, listen Jessica, I mean that if we tried to climb monster-crowded steps, considering we're not sure that my sealant theory will work; we stand to risk much more. My plan is to wire up a weapon from the ceiling and aim it at the door. We run out past those creatures once they're hit by sealant and we still have our other loaded weapons and my home-made grenades in reserve.”

Jessica exhaled a sigh of relief and said “That sounds better. Can I help?”

Glad for the offer of help, Thorn explained that they needed to affix the weapon to the top shelf, just below the ceiling; so the barrel points at the door. As the range is still close-quarter, they had to control the trigger by using a long piece of cable from the hiding position.

Once Thorn climbed up the shelving and reached the top shelf, Jessica passed up a weapon, metal wire and electrical cable they had

found in a box on another shelf. Thorn secured the weapon to the frame of the top shelf, with the weapon positioned at the exact angle he wanted – so it pointed at the storage room door. As Thorn continued setting up the trap, Jessica became alert to the repeated series of light 'Click' and dull 'Thump' sounds; which came from the other side of the storage room door. She sensed that the sounds occurred as beasts descended the concrete steps.

She urged Thorn in a nervous tone “Hurry! Hurry! The creatures are outside the door now.”

He secured one end of the cable to the trigger and unravelled the cable from the wooden drum as he descended the shelving as quick as possible without injuring himself. Jessica took the rest of the cable to the make-shift hideout behind the barrels while Thorn pulled the storage room door ajar. He ran over to Jessica's hiding place afterwards. As pre-arranged, after disconnecting the torch and activating the infra-red power supply from the battery on his belt, he held the cable tight. And Jessica had the torch aimed at the doorway and switched it off ready.

Thorn had a thought rushing through his mind, that the reptilians might move towards the door in a tactful and careful manner and sense it was a trap; in which case the fight was lost. What he did not know was that reptilians classed themselves to be of the highest standard of warrior, and most superior of species on Earth. So when eliminating humans, tactics had not been aforethought. If it just took one reptilian punch to burst the door open and off its hinges, well Thorn did not want to be on the receiving end.

As soon as the steel door flew open and the first few reptilians stepped over the threshold into the storage room, Jessica still saw their eyes through the dark. She switched the torch on and the light dazzled the unwanted guests as planned.

She shouted “Now!”

Upon hearing her command, Thorn gave a strong tug on the cable which pulled the weapon trigger. As if rehearsed, the sealant squirted out from the weapon; and as the reptilians stormed into the room they received a helping of grey slim which covered the top of the scaled heads, nostrils and mouths. The muscle-bound soldiers could not reach the scaled faces with the finger claws, to remove the sealant. In a state of panic they hissed non-stop and bashed everything around them with the one metre long studded wooden clubs; including each other.



Without being able to view the prey, the pair could not locate Jessica and Thorn in the room.

Jessica switched the torch back off, handed it back to Thorn, whereupon he placed the band around his head again and re-connected the power cable from his belt. They both kept near to the wall in a crouched position and remaining as quiet as possible followed it round to the left towards the room entrance. Once at the doorway threshold, they stood up and pointed the weapons to the front.

Upon Thorn hitting the 'On' torch switch, they sprayed the next pair of reptilians positioned on the steps. Thorn switched the torch back off and they both waited for a chance to move. After the sealant hardened, the pair of reptilians ran back up the steps in panic, tripped on the top step and disappeared into the darkness somewhere within the hospital dome.

Thorn whispered to Jessica "Let's head back to the capsule mono-rails, so we have more lighting."

"Okay." She whispered back.

Jessica did not stray from Thorn who, with his cover blown, switched the torch on again. With her weapon pointed to the rear, she covered the flanks too. Still walking as quiet as possible, they listened for any sounds ahead that might be signs of trouble. Before the mono-rail was in sight, they heard a loud banging on metal and muffled screams. Thorn showed Jessica by hand signal they should adopt a crouched position. As a precaution he switched the torch off again. The place was now in darkness, so he tapped her shoulder to let her know he intended to move forward still in a crouched position and she should follow.

When they got as close as possible without being seen, due to the lights from a few capsules hanging from the mono-rail; they could match the sounds with the scene out of focus to them. They moved up behind a pile of plastic boxes. Daring a peek over the boxes, they first seen three reptilians on guard. And in front of those another pair combing the capsules for prey. Neither Jessica nor Thorn could help the man, slaughtered by the reptilians after first battering the capsule out of shape.

The reptilians intended to take human remains back to wherever they came from, maybe for others not on this hunting trip; as they had large sacks hung over the shoulders and tied to waist belts. Both reptilian soldiers proceeded to the next capsule and begun with the

battering routine on the sides. After the creatures' clubs hit and dented the capsule, even though the inner padding silenced noise somewhat, from outside the screams from within had been audible. Before either

Jessica or Thorn had time to recognise the voice, a reptilian ripped open the side of the capsule as if its claw was a tin opener. The high pitched scraping sound as the metal ripped was painful to the human ear.

At that instant both Jessica and Thorn no longer needed to recognise the voice as they now saw it was Thorn's sister; who cursed between her screams and was soaking wet from perspiration caused by pure fear and panic. Her screams cooked the reptilian adrenalin – the soldiers getting more excited, with those on guard roaring at each other which motivated them more. The reptilians at the capsules joined in the frenzy and stamped on the ground in anticipation. Jessica and Thorn both stood up and ran forward. Thorn now switched the torch back on again and Jessica had her finger ready on the weapon trigger. He now had let his weapon drop to hang on the shoulder strap and had his hands full of the test tube grenades he had made earlier.

Thorn shouted as loud as possible “You! Yes you, you ugly crocs – get a dose of this!” as Jessica squirted an adequate helping of sealant at the three reptilian guards' heads.

Thorn had taken the initiative and as Jessica ambushed the reptilian guards, he followed after the others and launched the grenades at them both. This pair of reptilians, still bloated after consuming the other capsule traveller, could not react and instead just stood and watched what happened to the colleagues on guard duty. Team work was unknown to this species.

Jessica now called to the last of the three guards “Plenty for you as well” and fired off a another streak of sealant from her weapon.

As the reptilians did not run away but continued to sway the clubs around, Jessica and Thorn sprayed the scaled bodies too; and once the sealant hardened pushed them away. Thorn helped his distressed sister out of the capsule.

True hugged Thorn tight and still crying and shivering said “I thought I was next in line! I thought it was the end!”

Thorn calmed his sister with a another hug and said “Hey 'sis, it's Okay, everything is Okay now. Look who else came with me!”

True looked up and at first did not recognise her colleague – what with the weapon and a fresh aura of a battlefield-inoculated warrior.

Jessica stepped forward and asked “Hey, it's me Jessica, remember me?”

True served a question of her own “Jessica? Is that you?”

“Yes, it's me.” Jessica confirmed and handed True the other spare weapon and said “Take this – you might need it. We need to get out fast.”

True took the weapon and looked puzzled at Thorn.

Thorn explained “We converted these liquid pepper spray weapons to shoot dome panel sealant and we aim at the eyes and nostrils.” as he pointed to the five reptilians who still bobbed around in a mummified condition. He added “We'll explain things later.”

True turned up her nostrils to repel what she thought was a smell from an open sewer and looked at Jessica's and Thorn's footwear and said “Phew! Those beasts had one last weapon, and you both stepped in it.”

Jessica and Thorn wiped donned boots and shoes clean with the seat cover from True's elevator capsule.

Thorn urged “Okay. Look, we don't know how they arrived or how many. Jessica and True if everything goes according to plan, a rescue team awaits us on the other side of the refuse disposal tube. As Jessica said, we need to move.”

The three now followed the round inner base of the dome. After a hundred metres they listened to a strange grinding sound. Thorn made a hand gesture showing they should stand still. They stopped and just listened. What caused the noise was rough metal items coming into forced contact, orchestrated by a chopping sound. Curiosity took priority over the current threat. Not discussing any change of plan, the three strayed away from the inside dome base, and went to find out what caused the commotion.

Before moving though, Thorn switched off the torch. They got as close as they dared and moved a few metres over towards a few copper cylinders stacked next to each other. Each cylinder was one metre wide and three metres high. What they now saw may as well have been a scene out of a cheap film, but it explained why not every species evolved on Earth. The noise came from the winding-up of a large spring coil. The coil wrapped around the rear axle of the chassis of a basic vehicle.

The vehicle frame had a flat slab of stone at the front, followed by a brown wooden base to the rear. Vehicle wheels were of stone, chassis

and axles from solid wood. The vehicle dimensions measured eight metres long and three metres wide. Such a vehicle could not travel long journeys. One reptilian stood on the wooden deck of the vehicle and continued to work a fixed metal lever back and forth, which turned a large flat metal cog. The cog's teeth met with the teeth of another smaller cog around the rear axle.

As the reptile pulled the level back, the cog mechanism moved, and the spring tightened. A deadlock mechanism on the lever stopped the spring unwinding until triggered. The strength needed to pull the extraordinary large lever, which wound up a giant spring coil; could not be provided by a group of sturdy men.

Thorn looked for the cause of the chopping sound he heard earlier and discovered a horrific event; from which upon viewing he preferred to spare Jessica and True. He knew what use this vehicle had for the reptilians. It served as a slaughter wagon and the people left behind in the hospital dome could now be butchered.

He whispered quick to Jessica “Take True and go back to the dome wall. I want to make sure the path ahead is safe for us to continue and will catch you up afterwards.”

Jessica did not question Thorn's instruction and took True by the hand and led her back to the inside dome wall. Both remained crouched and waited for Thorn to join them. As Thorn continued to watch, he thought to himself how these creatures had entered the dome; imagining it was from underground. The butchered remains of newer breed citizens had landed in cloth sacks. As reptilian soldiers loaded the sacks onto the wagon, they took orders from a figure in a black hooded cloak. Thorn strained his eyes to get a better look at this figure which stood in the opposite direction.

With the last of the brown blood-stained sacks now being loaded, the standing figure checked to make sure they had forgotten no sacks. Thorn now got a glimpse of the creature's face. He became nauseated as while confronted by the reptilian troops earlier. This beast was reptilian but its head and face resembled a snake. It was now obvious to Thorn that different reptilian races existed, one being intelligent and the other primitive.

As he had no command of the reptilian language, to Thorn it just sounded as though the reptilians hissed at each other. But when the cloaked one hissed, the soldiers obeyed. It was such a command that prompted a reptilian soldier, which telling by the blood-dripping axe

stuffed between a scaled hip and leather belt was the butcher; to ascend the vehicle's rear step and take hold of the lever.

At the front of the vehicle a reptilian driver stood in a stone well and held the front axle reigns. Due the thick armoured tails a seat was impractical. Thorn tried to figure out in which direction the reptilians intended driving the vehicle as hospital dome tunnel exits were no longer open. Light was inadequate for him to have a panorama view of the inside of the dome. The reptilian in charge of the lever let out a deep roar and pulled a trigger on the front of the lever which released the cog deadlock. Pressure released as the spring uncoiled, the vehicle shot forward and disappeared along a wooden ramp. The other reptilian soldiers followed, on clawed foot behind the vehicle and as they did they caved in the entrance to the tunnel they had made. This provided the answer to Thorn's puzzle of how the reptilians planned to exit the dome with the vehicle.

## Chapter 13

Thorn returned to the location at which Jessica and True had been waiting for him. When he arrived they both looked up towards the middle of the dome, at the colossal hospital platform towering fifty metres in the air.

True asked “I wonder what happened to those patients on the platform?”

“I guess the quarantine must have broken, and as for the patients well we have seen how many had met a horrible end. Others escaped as I cut a doorway in the tunnel seal.” Thorn added.

Jessica still looked at the platform and pointing in the same direction said “Look! Part of the platform has turned grey and is, well, hollow – even transparent.”

True looked at Thorn and they both gave each other a knowing stare.

True explained “Jessica, you know that patients have been in quarantine?”

“Yes I'm aware of that.” she said.

“Well the virus, the fluid, is what caused the current destruction.” True continued.

Thorn nodded his head in agreement and added “One thing still puzzles me though, that these lizard people or whatever they are; are either immune to this virus or their arrival and departure from the dome was part of a timed plan. If the latter, it showed there was more behind these apocalyptic events; and the whole virus outbreak took place according to a secret agenda.”

True asked Thorn “Do you think that something this evil could be part of an agenda?”

“Well True, I gained information from the outside, from my old breed contact. You can acquaint yourself with him, um.... and the rest of the rescue team in a while. We can then update each other with what details we have and maybe fit the pieces of the puzzle together.” Thorn said.

Mid-sentence, Thorn remembered that Leo should be part of the rescue team and did not want to spoil the surprise for his sister. Jessica now prompted the other pair into action, which showed that they thought the reptilians had not left, or might still be returning. So Thorn led the group and increased the pace when he saw the large refuse

disposal tube in the distance. As they came within twenty metres of the tube, Thorn disclosed to Jessica and True that exit from the hospital dome was to be through that tube.

When the refuse disposal tube was ten metres away Thorn said in a quiet tone “If you both wait, I'll go and check the refuse disposal zone. Under the circumstances though I reckon none of the guards or workers are there. I'll flash the torch twice when it's safe for you to follow me.”

Jessica and True again both waited for Thorn to return and collect them. Thorn left them and went to check the zone ahead. As he got closer the familiar smell of domestic refuse reached his nostrils. And although not that repulsive he looked forward to being back outside and breathing fresh air again. Approaching the refuse disposal tube loading machine, Thorn stopped to admire this huge and monstrous iron construction; which masked many conveyor belts and robotic arms of various sizes.

The wall of empty cocoons, towering above him rack upon rack, emphasised just how small humans on this planet are. The whole zone was desolate, which was to be expected after the reptilian attack. Thorn checked every corner and shadow, and upon the second round he was content it was safe; and switched the torch on and off twice to signal to Jessica and True. Upon seeing Thorn's signal they followed the route he had taken and headed towards the torch light. As Thorn came into view, he looked in their direction and waved for them to hurry. Once they neared the zone, True pointed at the black-haired man dressed in a black hooded cloak, who stood just behind Thorn.

She said to Jessica “Looks as though Thorn found someone.”

Upon arriving at the Thorn's location and assuming he knew that the person stood behind him; True looked at Thorn first, and next at the hooded man and said “Hello I'm Trudy and she is Jessica.”

As he was sure not one person or reptilian was within the refuse disposal tube zone, Thorn jumped in shock upon realising that True was talking to someone behind him. As he jumped, out of reflex he turned towards the hooded person. The hooded man's face looked different – it just was not natural. When Thorn viewed the face, it was as if through three-dimensional glasses. He tried to adjust the angle from which he observed the man's face, but the face remained in the strange form. It was at that moment that Thorn recalled that he had seen the same black cloak earlier.

At once Thorn held his weapon to the stranger's face and in a demanding tone asked "Who are you? That's not a human's face! What do you want?"

Although puzzled by Thorn's reaction, Jessica trusted his instinct and now pointed her weapon at the man too.

"Thorn? Jessica? Everything Okay?" True asked.

Thorn kept a close eye on the stranger and said "We'll know within the next few minutes I imagine."

The man produced a green oval device from his cloak and pressed a black button on it. The three had now become witness to a technology unknown to them. At first the face distorted, next the body outline changed, the body itself grew in size and the head hair disappeared. Now the face vibrated, and the shape morphed back to the original form – speechless, they watched as the disguise disappeared. The stone-hard evil glare and slithery forked tongue moving as if uncontrolled, was both grotesque and repulsive to this small group of humans.

The reptilian, ignoring the potential threat of the weapons, said "Today you survive – I congratulate you humans. But... the human world will not survive!" Pointing up towards the now deteriorating hospital platform, it continued "You see – the virus is spreading. Soon, soon we will return. We will take back what is ours."

Before either Jessica, Thorn or True could ask questions, the reptilian turned and walked into the darkness of the dome centre. Had Thorn have had any test tube grenades left he could have thrown one after the reptilian. Without discussing this occurrence, they ran over to the refuse disposal tube. Thorn moved the cocoon crane arm and held up the loading panel on the side of the first tube.

Thorn explained "Once you're in the tube, just keep going. Although the tubes are long, a rescue team waits for us at the other end."

He remembered this unofficial dome exit route from when they traded goods outside with the old breed. They decided it be best for Jessica to enter the tube first, followed by True; with Thorn last to cover the tunnel to the rear in case of unwelcome followers. Once the three of them entered the tunnel, Thorn closed the loading panel. Jessica now wore the head band with torch as she led the group through the refuse disposal tube; and needed to light ahead of them. It felt as though the tube stretched for miles. And within a short time feet, joints and hand palms ached; which was a sign that the design of



the human body did not accommodate moving around in such cramped conditions. As thousands of cocoons launched through the refuse disposal tubes over time, the inside surface of the tube was smooth.

Jessica, being at the front, was the first to sight the round steel door at the end of the tube. She pushed the door bit by bit outwards, unsure if a rescue team awaited them. Hanging from the tube, she first let go once she seen the ground was just one metre away. True and later Thorn followed her out of the tube. And as Thorn landed, the door above them closed. As they looked around, none of them saw any sign of the rescue team. Jessica and True looked at Thorn for an explanation.

A harsh whisper came from three metres to their side “Get that light off now! And get into cover!”

Thorn was glad to recognise Relt's voice even though Jessica and True felt put off by his rough command. The camouflage of the rescue team had impressed Thorn. The ten men just a few metres away could not be seen. Each rescue team member wore a suite which covered the whole body. The suits' main frame was hand-made from string net, with hundreds of small bits of different coloured rags attached to it; distorting the human-form silhouette and blending into the surroundings.

Relt said to Thorn “Who is the third person? We expected just the pair of you.”

“Sorry Relt, allow me to introduce Jessica, a colleague of True's, who fought by my side earlier.” said Thorn pointing to Jessica and to the dome.

Relt shook hands with Jessica and True and said “Okay let's get into that tent.”

As planned before with Leo and Thorn, the rescue team erected a tent. Once in the hand-sewn brown leather tent, Relt ensured that they proceeded as quick as possible with attending to the wrist chips. He made sure that Leo was one of the men on guard outside the tent—plenty of time was available for a family reunion later once up the ramp.

Relt explained to Jessica and True “Before we can move we need to deactivate and remove the implanted wrist chips. Otherwise they'll trigger an alarm as you move away from the dome network.”

Both Jessica and True understood. True volunteered to have her wrist chip removed first. Relt, with Thorn's help, uncovered the part of

skin on True's wrist which needed to be scanned; and soaked it with anaesthetic fluid. Afterwards he did the same with Jessica's wrist. By the time Relt finished deactivating the chips, he began with removing True's chip and Jessica's afterwards as the pair's wrists were now numb. Thorn assisted with bandaging up the wrists.

“We'll move disguised as a hunting group returning to the ramp.”  
Said Relt.

Relt signalled to a member of the rescue team to hand the three a camouflage suit each. The hunters among the team always had spares with them and so supplied Jessica with a suit too.

Relt added “Once you've got suits on, we can make a move. I thought you'd be leaving the dome much earlier, so guessed that something must have gone wrong. You can tell us what happened once up the ramp.”

Now with Jessica, Thorn and True camouflaged, the whole thirteen-person group were ready to move. Once outside, they collapsed the tent and packed it away. Relt produced a bunch of rabbits, which he had collected that morning from his snares; and shared them among the whole team to make them look the part as members of the hunting team. Leo winked at Thorn to let him know that he was part of the team. The group moved out in a tight formation, across the wasteland as quiet as possible. The journey to the ramp went without incident.

When they arrived at the ramp, they remained crouched while Relt cupped his hands together so that his thumbs pressed against each other. With the thumb knuckles as a mouth-piece, he blew and controlled the owl call by moving his fingers; the signal to lower the steel ramp. Once inside the cargo container network, the ramp elevated again and the whole group led by Relt went through to the food canteen as a warm meal awaited them.

Without wanting to be seen as rude guests, Jessica, True and Thorn fought to resist tucking into the food and drink. A serving of cooked fresh potatoes, vegetables, chicken and gravy was a different food experience for them. Once they placed the full plates of food upon the large table, they went over to the cloak room. In that room they could climb out of the camouflage suits, clean themselves up and change into more comfortable clothing; which Relt had had supplied for the three guests. As they came back over to the table, one of the other members of the rescue team waited for them.

True did not recognise him at first until he turned to face her and

said “Welcome to the old breed settlement sis!”

She could not believe that standing before her now was her brother Leo. Although she had been thinking of him, he was the last person she expected to see today. As they both ran into each other's arms, Thorn came over to them and held them both in his arms. After the meal a debriefing on recent events took place. For this purpose Relt arranged for one of the container rooms to be used, and for refreshments to be available. For those not aware of Leo's, Relt's and Thorn's plan; Relt gave a quick summary. Afterwards each gave an update and discussed the next course of action.

“Not long after Leo joined our settlement, Thorn approached me and explained the problem of the wrist chip virus outbreak. And how the fluid erupted from the infected skin pores of the victims, and fed on any material matter apart from glass; rendering objects as empty shells. The newer breed with their wrist chips served as involuntary carriers. Thorn's part of the plan had been to liaise with his sister Trudy – may I call you 'True', Trudy?”

True said “Yes, please call me 'True'.”

Relt continued “And together both to exit the hospital dome through the refuse disposal tube. My part of the plan was to have Thorn's wrist chip analysed and to head the rescue team, with Leo on board; liaise with Thorn and True and bring them back to the ramp. True, maybe if you start with your update?”

The company at the table was informal enough for True to stay seated and give her update. But she did first take a sip from her cup of tea which she poured herself while Relt had spoken earlier.

True began with her update “To recap, I'd been on shift as a nurse as the first victims arrived at the hospital dome. The symptom being a skin rash which within a short time turned normal skin pores into mini craters. It was from these pores that the virus fluid came. I took a sample of this fluid home in a glass test tube for closer examination. During the same evening that Thorn visited, we made a plan of action together as we understood that a military control of the hospital was most likely. I was to go to hospital and note how they planned to handle the virus outbreak, and if they intended to inform the Administration Force. And send a message to our parents at the pension dome. So first I called the pension dome, but a staff member told me that our parents were off on a day trip. So I left a message for them. Next I took a capsule elevator from my apartment to the hospital

dome. I didn't reach the hospital though. When the capsule stopped, on account of the time I'd been in the capsule; I estimated that I must be in the hospital dome but not yet at the platform. At first I thought the problem might be due to a power cut and hoped it may be back on soon. Later I was to become audio witness to a massacre. I could just listen to the metal being ripped open, people crying, running and screaming. I couldn't match any known animal to the hissing and roaring sounds. It was terrifying, in particular when the capsule next to mine got ripped apart and the passenger butchered alive. Jessica and Thorn arrived just in time!” and as she finished she blew a kiss to Jessica and Thorn.

Relt said “Thanks, True, for the update. Thorn, it's your turn to give an update now, Jessica can add any other information afterwards which she feels relates to this issue.”

Thorn obliged with his update too “The plan I arranged with True at her apartment that evening, was for me to first contact Relt; for help obtaining information on wrist chip production. And to find a method to remove our wrist chips, without triggering an alarm. After meeting with Leo and Relt and having my wrist chip removed, I went back to my apartment and waited for True to arrive. The plan was to escape via the hospital dome with her. Soon I guessed that something must have happened, as my sister was a punctual person and still hadn't arrived. I took an elevator capsule to look for True at her place of work. When my capsule got stuck, I cut my way out and freed Jessica from hers. We found that the tunnel to the hospital dome was closed, and now used as a store room. At the end of the tunnel we armed ourselves with pepper spray weapons. But we found that dome entrance blocked. We heard people on the other side so I cut a doorway out of the metal tunnel seal. People burst through the doorway – most had received injuries in the dome and many of them even had limbs missing. Jessica and I entered the dome once the people left and within a short time found ourselves confronted by what can be described as crocodiles standing upright. These creatures could speak our language. The pepper spray didn't work as on humans. In a store room we could exchange the pepper spray weapon content with a dome sealant mix, which we fired at their eyes and nostrils; the sealant hardened and saved our lives. These creatures are soldiers, who received orders from a more intelligent form of the species; to butcher those humans still in the hospital dome. On a stone vehicle they left

the dome via underground tunnel, with sacks full of human body parts. The one overseeing the soldiers spoke to us. They believe that they're superior to humans and are taking back what is believed to be theirs! The attack was not a coincidence, it was part of an agenda. The one giving the orders wore a black cloak, but the soldiers only bits of rags or armour and rough wooden clubs as weapons.”

Relt said “Thanks Thorn, things will become more clearer I reckon when I give my update. But first though, Jessica please give us your update?”

“Well, apart from what Thorn explained; the only thing I can add is that I had just finished my shift as General Kern made his surprise visit to the hospital dome. I saw through the small glass ward door window, how the General used a finger of one of his soldiers to test what happened; when the virus fluid from a victim's pore came into contact with another person. From what I observed, the virus fluid didn't absorb into the soldier's skin. Instead it spread over the soldier's suit. The suit turned transparent as though the virus ate the material. This happened to the soldier's face mask too resulting in suffocation. The nurse on duty in the ward received an order by Kern to sedate the victim, and to remove the wrist chip. The General's officer placed the chip into a container and used a scanner to deactivate it – as Relt did with ours. Kern had the Hospital Director placed under arrest for interfering and handed him over to the hospital security. The General and his escort team made a quick departure.” Jessica explained.

Relt said “Thank you Jessica for the update, and now for mine. Thorn, you recall back when we spoke in the vehicle? That I said there was more to be told when you asked me for information on the wrist chip vendor company?”

“Yes, I remember.” Thorn confirmed.

“Well what I intended to explain to you later is no longer necessary as I'm sure you have met one of the company owners; the black cloaked creature! The creatures are known as reptilians. They live deep below the Earth's surface and have been around since before mankind existed. Legend has it that one day they'll reclaim the Earth and rise again to the surface. I had Thorn's wrist chip dismantled and examined with a microscope. What we found out is that this chip, and we assume every other one produced too, had a built-in tube which contained an unknown fluid. Now we learned from Thorn that the virus fluid was purple. This stuff was blue and didn't react to our tests.

I had the idea to mix it with a drop of my blood, and the result of the mixture was the purple virus! When it came into contact with any material it ate through it the same as you have explained. So the story of reptilians wanting to reclaim the Earth was no longer a legend – but reality.” Relt continued.

Relt suggested “Now we have given our updates, before we discuss what to do next; Thorn you can retire now for a short interval together with Leo and True. As I believe that you have something private to discuss.” and nodded his head at Thorn so he understood what Relt meant.

Thorn said “Yes, thanks Relt. Um, Leo, True, could you both come with me? I have something to tell you both.”

Leo and True looked puzzled at each other as they got up from the table and followed Thorn.

Once the others left the canteen, Relt asked Jessica “What of your parents? At which dome do they live?”

Jessica said “I had never known my parents – I was just a baby when the authorities took me. As a child I never left the education dome.”

Relt explained to her “The reason I asked, Jessica, is that I needed to find out if you had parents in the so-called pension dome. As you don't, and so won't be shocked on a personal level, I can tell you the truth behind the pension dome. And that is at sixty every newer breed member receives a birthday card, compliments of the World Administration. The card is soaked in a liquid that gives off a toxic fume disguised as a perfume fragrance. Those fumes kill when inhaled. Incoming calls to the pension dome are handled by World Administration staff, who use voice manipulation software with pre-recordings of the voices of the dome residents. So Thorn has to tell Leo and True how the lives of their parents; who they believed to be enjoying life in the pension dome, had been terminated.”

Jessica cried, but not for herself; instead more for Leo and True because of the personal pain both must now be experiencing. And even more for Thorn who, experiencing the same loss, was the bearer of this terrible news.

After wiping her tears away with her jacket sleeve she said “Relt after what I saw at hospital and having confronted a reptilian race I didn't know existed; I'd say other secrets exist, which they keep from us!”

By the time Jessica and Relt drank another cup of tea, Leo, True and Thorn returned to the canteen. Jessica stood up and held True in her arms, which prompted another burst of tears – but this time from both of them.

Relt now gave a summary “So we can be safe to say that the reptilians have an agenda, to gain control on the Earth's surface. The reptilian elite is to an extent collaborating with that of the World Administration, and it's obvious that the reptilians intend to gain even more. The virus outbreak has just begun and will spread throughout the dome network within a short time, and most likely not stop. The humans on whole planet will cease to exist as a civilisation. So We need to look at possible options we have available to us. Any ideas?”

True commented “Well I reckon we've decided that we want to survive, otherwise we'd not be together now.”

“If we can find a method of saving our people, do you think that we'd be able to take children from the education centre with us?” Jessica asked.

“Although for the majority of the dome dwellers, alias 'newer breed' as you call them; even if we wanted to warn them bets are that either the reptilian or the virus will be faster.” True added.

An agreement was reached. If they can give warning they should; but not if it meant obstructing own plans or putting themselves at risk of arrest.

Thorn said “Whatever we do, if we're successful, it's on a small scale considering it's a global problem. We'd need to get messages to other old breed communities around the world, for them to repeat what we did.”

“One question remains – what should we do?” Said Leo.

The discussion continued for another sixty minutes with no solution being found. It was understood though that everyone needed to be evacuated. As the virus might reach everywhere around the world, at which location could they seek refuge? Thorn shot up as if his chair was electrified. Startled by Thorn's sudden movement, everyone else in the room looked at him.

Thorn announced “The answer to our problem lies within the trees!”

Relt said “Thorn, can you be more specific?”

Thorn continued “Yes because of the events surrounding the virus outbreak; I forgot to tell anyone of what I saw the other day as I ate my lunch. I was carrying out repair work on one of the defence domes. As

I looked towards the forest I felt being under observation. I caught sight of the watcher, who was hidden between trees. The watcher did not appear human. It either wore a form of camouflage suit or the green face had leaves growing out of the part which humans have covered in hair. The peaceful aura this being had, overwhelmed me. The gaze from the watcher was so knowing and understanding, that now I reckon it knew of the upcoming virus outbreak. If we could meet with these forest folk, I'm sure that they can recommend what to do."

"How could a civilisation living in a forest offer advice? But I'm open to any help we can get." Said True.

As nothing else was possible until they had a proper evacuation plan, the group intended to ride out on horse-back the next day to the watcher's forest location. They understood that the chance of seeing the watcher, let alone meeting one of them was small. Early the next morning they needed to travel to the hunting group's outpost as it contained the horse stables there. At dawn the ramp descended, and the team of five started out on the journey to the hunting group's outpost on foot. Relt arranged with the quartermaster earlier via carrier pigeon for the group to be clothed with hunting outfits.

Armed with crossbows for defence, and protected from the morning frost by the layers of fur and cloth, they started on the journey to the outpost. Relt reckoned that with a good pace they might be at the outpost before nightfall. As Relt remembered the route so well he could walk it blind-folded, they arrived in time. Even though during the journey they heard wolves in the distance, the trek went without occurrence. At the outpost even with a small hunting group stationed; upon approach a sentry guard challenged their entry.

Camouflaged, the guard was not spotted. Just the voice asking for a password, a password which Relt confirmed to the invisible sentry. After the sentry stood up they followed him into the outpost. This outpost comprised from green industrial containers forming a 'U' shape, with the horse stables in the middle. They arrived after sunlight disappeared for the day, and just in time to join the hunting group for supper. Boiling rabbit stew and fresh bread, was in plenty.

Although with little room available, the hunters prepared sleeping arrangements for the five visitors. Horses for the five person team had saddles, rations, water and basic camping equipment fitted by members of the hunting group. Relt had not considered that out of the



five of them, the others had no riding experience. So he chose the brown horses for the others. Although not used for hard labour, these horses, of a majestic stature, were tame through experience in transporting humans long distances. The main problem was as they tried to mount the horses, which towered over the riders-to-be. Relt called a few of the hunting team over to help the others mount the horses. Once mounted, the group started out on the journey to the forest, out past Defence Dome 102, in single file in the order Thorn, Jessica, Relt, True and Leo.

## Chapter 14

Back in his office, General Kern was ready to face another day and commanded his Adjutant to enter and give his daily report, known as a sit-rep; and read the agenda from Kern's calendar for that day. With no patience, waiting always caused him to look over at his certificates and photographs of himself receiving awards and medals, hung on the wall for display; as if looking for an explanation why he had to tolerate subordinates who could not deliver information without first being prompted. The Adjutant marched into Kern's office, stamped to attention as he halted, swung a salute and asked for permission to continue. As soon as Kern gave him the requested permission, the Adjutant was just starting when Kern stopped him.

The General, being in a mood of perfection looked at the Adjutant's tie; and said "As an officer of the Word Administration Force, and my personal assistant, I expect that uniform to be immaculate. Do you understand me Adjutant?"

Waking from a dream, in which he was in a relaxing working environment; the Adjutant stood to attention. He saw that the General stared at his loosened tie, adjusted it to fit exact and said "Yes, General Kern, I understand. It will not happen again."

Kern said "Good. Go ahead. I have not got time to spare!"

As many times before, the Adjutant cursed the General under his breath. But this time created a scenario in his mind, although without fine details, that highlighted a clip in which Kern had to beg for mercy and the Adjutant...

"Wake up man!" the General shouted, which pulled the Adjutant back to reality again.

Embarrassed that his employer Kern had caught him day-dreaming, the Adjutant decided to begin with his report; as attempting to defend himself with an excuse was not worth the effort.

"General, reports have come in from other hospital domes of patients arriving with the same symptoms as those in Hospital Dome Ninety Seven. And we have received reports of networks near that dome being destroyed by the purple virus as it spreads. The count of civilians deaths increased as a direct result – the main cause of death being by suffocation." he said.

As he pondered on the speed at which the virus was spreading, Kern pointed with an open hand to a chair off to a side of his desk. The

Adjutant followed the gesture, sat but did not slouch.

Kern, now speaking in a more casual tone said “Adjutant, pour yourself a drink and one for me too. I think that it wise to make evacuation precautions in case this virus continues to spread – for the safety of our citizens course. Have the Media Director report today to discuss the warning banners we need to show on the advertising screens. And make arrangements for Force officers to be transported to the Administration Control Dome. We will follow as soon we have completed the tasks.”

The Adjutant finished his drink and returned to standing to attention, whereupon he saluted the General, turned and left Kern's office. Back in his own office he made calls to the Media Director and to the Force Vehicle Depot Commander. Later that morning the Media Director reported to the General. As he got called into the office, his bright red business suit gave the effect of lighting up the whole room. Kern detested this eccentric dresser.

Kern put on a civilian-friendly face and said “Thank you for coming at such short notice Director. I need expert advice in resolving a global emergency.”

The Director seated without invitation in one of the leather imitation chairs and said “Pleasure to help, General.”

Kern, wishing he was wearing sunglasses to reduce the tone of this man's suit, proceeded “Director we need to prepare an evacuation. And splash warning banners and instructions for citizens to follow, on the advertising screens in the dome network. So I need help from you. I need you to create the banners with the evacuation warnings. The banners are to be on permanent display from tomorrow onwards – citizens are to travel to the nearest hospital dome. They are to stay put and await collection from external planes. I am sure you are the best person for this task and I can count on you.”

The Director, dumb-struck for a change, asked out of interest “Evacuation, General? Why? What is the threat?”

Kern said “You know I am bound by military law and cannot give any details. I can assure you just a precaution though as we have addressed the problem. On the warning banners explain it as a precautionary safety measure, that we discovered erosion areas; and for health reasons we want to be on the safe side while we carry out repairs.”

The Media Director confirmed “Yes, I can manage that. I will have

the banners on the screens from tomorrow morning and will remove them when I receive the instruction.” As an after-thought he asked “Which evacuation instructions should I follow, General?”

Kern considered the question before replying, and decided that although despicable, the creep could be of use; and said “Sorry Director, I forgot to mention we have made separate evacuation arrangements for the senior management level; please forgive me. Our Vehicle Depot Commander will reserve a seat for you. He will let you know the departure schedule for the next twenty-four hours.”

For Kern the day went well, and he had even impressed himself. Although his Adjutant was behaving odd during the last few weeks, which put Kern in a temporary negative mood whenever that man was in his presence. Kern had no tolerance for weak people and always hoped his officers reached the same calibre as himself, but that still had yet to happen. While the Adjutant and the Media Director carried out the tasks, Kern intended to pack his kit bag and secure document case – ready to move.

He intended to leave the dome network by that evening. First though he called his Adjutant and instructed him to brief the Vehicle Depot Commander, that the Media Director was to board one of the vehicles; which was to transport officers to the Administration Control Dome. The Vehicle Depot Commander reported to the Adjutant's office as requested and waited outside until called. The red metal chairs lining the wall outside the Adjutant's office looked miniature in ratio to the beefy build of the man waiting. So he opted to stand instead of attempting to sit.

Being a born and bred mechanic, he never wore any oil-stain-free clothing. And so it was rare that he sat on anyone else's furniture other than his own. As a lower rank, upon hearing the call to enter the Commander marched. But to the Adjutant, the Commander reminded him of a charging bull, and hoped the man stopped before ramming through the desk. The Adjutant, relieved that the Commander stopped his momentum by driving his boot to the floor, and satisfied that he had paid his respect with a salute; began with the delegation.

“Commander, I have a task for you which needs to be completed this morning still. It has priority over other tasks you had planned. You are to make sure every vehicle is operational and ready for use as evacuation transport for Force officers, who need to be taken to the Administration Control Dome; within the next twenty-four hours. One

more thing – General Kern gave the order for you to reserve a seat on a vehicle for the Media Director. Contact the Media Director and give him a copy of the vehicle departure schedule for the next twenty-four hours. You may go now, Commander.”

The Commander, imagining one of his shovel-sized hands wrapped around the Adjutant's throat, and crushing the wimp's airway, confirmed “I will make arrangements now.”

*'I wonder from what that lot are running?'* The Commander thought to himself as he left the Adjutant's office.

By mid-afternoon the platform deck of the W.A.F was full with vehicles, with other vehicles parked at-the-ready nearby. Officers who's duties did not need them to stay, received orders to be ready-to-move; which meant they had to have kit packed and with them on parade. After producing warning banners, citizen evacuation instructions, and instructing staff for the screens' 'on air' time; the Media Director deemed it best to get on the next available vehicle.

Once on board one of shuttles with his belongings, he reported to the vehicle Loading Supervisor. Still wearing his red suit, the Media Director stuck out among the rows of Force officers dressed in combat suits. He soon noticed that the officers had issued packed meals with them, and even though the quality of the meals was low; his mouth watered as those men got stuck in to the rations. It was the Loading Supervisor who took pity on him and threw him one of the spare meal packs.

Opening the white plastic box, with excitement he inspected the contents label: 1 x Sachet of Apple sauce. 2 x Sealed Sandwiches. 1 x Tin of Orange Soda. Quiet sneers came from the officers as they watched the civilian passenger approach his ration pack as if it was a gourmet meal. After the passengers finished the ration pack meals, within a short time the Loading Supervisor informed them via the intercom; that the vehicle was landing soon on the Administration Control Dome platform. Around the Administration Control Dome hovering traffic moved in every direction.

The Administration Control Dome platform was the place for action – if you belonged to the elite and wealthy. As the vehicle landed, the platform magnetic field clamped the machine in place, allowing the passengers to depart. Escort staff had been at hand to show the passengers to the accommodation, brief them on the facilities available and how to navigate around this secluded over-dimensional city; built

upon a multi-level platform within a gigantic dome. Kern and his Adjutant arrived later. Kern scheduled to meet with the World Administration Board the next morning – he intended to give them a sit-rep they would not forget.

Now though he retired to his new quarters. Once in his quarters, which for one person was extravagant in size and quality but was the suite to which his rank entitled him; he used the time alone to send a message to that creature Larsst. Years before, Kern had a computer screen developed which had touch-screen message buttons – this he gave to Larsst so that Kern could communicate with him via email. Larsst was happy with the communication gift as typical device keyboards had not been reptilian claw-friendly. With this screen he could tap the buttons on it. The default buttons read 'Yes', 'No', 'Hello', 'Goodbye', and a display menu provided a list of common words.

Kern sat at his workstation and using his computer mouse cursor clicked on an empty email. With the grey keyboard he typed:

'Dear Larsst,

I thank you for the help at the hospital dome.

We appreciate the efficient work accomplished and now seek consent to renew the current contract for the other World Administration hospital domes. The cleaning work can start in forty-eight hours.

Yours Sincerely,

General Kern'

Happy with the draft he typed, Kern clicked on the button 'Send'. Now the problem with the citizens who now travelled to the nearest hospital dome, was off his desk he could now prepare his speech; which he intended to give at the World Administration Board meeting tomorrow. He hoped to sell them a different global network, blaming the pandemic on those old breed members who underwent trade training during the cleansing period.

A few things which still hassled Kern was first the fact that the virus continued to spread. And he found it strange that the reptilians had no concerns with regards entering the contaminated domes. Both must be

connected. He needed to find a method of stopping the virus even if the current dome network was beyond repair; and he was sure the answer was within the reptilians' realm. Kern poured himself a drink and pondered over how he might investigate. Then the idea came to him – he just needed to be at one of the hospital domes to watch how the reptilians coped with the contaminated areas. Kern drafted another message for Larsst – but this time he needed to be clever with his wording:

'Dear Larsst,

If possible please begin with Hospital Dome 98. I think it makes sense to do the hospital domes in order. It may interest you to know that is one of the larger hospital platforms. So I am sure you agree that it be optimal for business operations if the larger ones are attended to first, enabling you thereafter to see which stock needs to be replenished before proceeding; as supplies may not be that plentiful during the winter months.

Yours Sincerely,

General Kern'

Knowing that Larsst understood what 'stock' meant, he sent off the message. He hoped Larsst might jump at the chance to top up the reptilians' winter supply of human organs early. Tomorrow, after his meeting with the Board, Kern planned to take his private shuttle to the Hospital Dome 98 to watch the reptilians. The Board always met on the highest floor of the Administration Control Dome. The meeting room had twelve doors – one for each Board member. Each Board member had a suite from which they could enter the meeting room. In the meeting room itself a large light blue oval table was in the centre, and twelve chrome thrones.

Kern always ensured that the Board members had individual entertainment preferences catered for – with discretion. So he always counted on them favouring suggestions he made. '*Now they have stuffed guts from lunch they'll be more drowsy.*' Kern thought as he entered the meeting room. And as the General entered the chattering ceased.

“Gentleman, I am grateful that a slot for my report was possible in such a busy agenda today. Due to the seriousness of the matter, I will begin with the details. Upon my visit to Hospital Dome Ninety Seven, I discovered that the virus was more destructive as first thought. The victims had not been recovering and the fluid ejecting from the wrist skin pores a growing mass which eats on most material matter. The wave of death and destruction spread so fast, that to delay it somewhat we sealed off that dome from the rest of the network. We need to accept the fact that the virus will destroy the whole of our dome network soon.” Kern reported.

A bearded red-robed Board member asked “General, is a cure available? What action can we take?”

Glad they had taken the bait which now lead into his solution to the problem, Kern said “No, I am afraid a cure is not available. I have a proposal though which will guarantee the survival of our race.”

Another member of the Board, showing the fear on his face, burst out “Well? Well? Tell us of the proposal!”

Kern continued “We identified that the first intake of infected patients was old breed, who as you may recall had gone through the Administration Centres and given trade training. As our dome network will cease to exist, I propose that a different network be constructed; this time though higher above the ground.”

He switched on the projector which beamed a 3D section plan of part of the network, onto the surface of the oval table.

“As I mentioned earlier, this solution is just for the survival of the pure newer breed; so is vital we control those citizens evacuated to the network once built. For this I intend to use the statistics pulled from the wrist chip data – the newer breed citizens receive then an update to the implanted chips.” Kern explained.

Another Board member asked “But what will happen to those citizens classified as old breed?”

Kern was ready to reply but attended to his mobile telephone as it beeped. He apologised and explained, holding up the device, that if he was correct a message just came in which gave the answer the last question. He looked at the telephone display after clicking a button to view the email and saw it was from Larst and it contained one word 'Yes'.

The General looked up and with confidence announced “The message I just received is from a contractor, who confirmed that his



organisation will coordinate the evacuation. And liaise with the old breed citizens at the hospital domes for evacuation. Many of the newer breed, who will evacuate to the network, attend education centres. And are as we classify them: The Youth.”

Kern now waited for the Board to decide. The Board stood and retired to another room to the rear of the oval table, to discuss the decision. After ten minutes the Board returned to the meeting room and seated again – apart from the Head of the Board, who now stood.

The Head of the Board, remaining seated as a mark of authority, confirmed “General Kern, the Board has reached a decision on the current state of affairs and your proposal. The Board accepts the proposed solution. This project has an unlimited budget. You are to head the project. You will have full command of required resources and services. Evacuation is to be just for those citizens born in a hospital dome, and World Administration staff above security clearance Alpha, which includes security forces. Building is to start now and evacuation as soon as the first accommodation platforms are ready. The official public explanation for this project is that selected citizens are invited to test an improved network. We assume that those we leave behind will join the old breed settlement beyond our network.”

With a nod of his head and stamping of his boot heels, Kern confirmed he accepted and understood the task; turned and left the Board meeting room. He had plans for a task force to replace current key military positions. After finishing distributing emails, which sent sets of blue-prints to the contractors required for building the network. Kern then instructed his Adjutant to prepare the private shuttle and report dressed in full combat suit, ready to move; in thirty minutes time.

The Adjutant, glad he did not have to go through the procedure of logging a vehicle out from the depot, donned his black combat trousers, shirt, pullover and jacket. After slipping his socked feet into the high-leg black combat boots, he pulled the trouser strings tight so the trouser bottoms stayed above the leather boot tops. Now ready for deployment, the Adjutant went to Kern's shuttle dock; which could either be accessed from within the General's suite or an external door for which the Adjutant had a key.

Once through the steel door he locked it from within as the General was arriving at the dock via his suite entrance. The dock was in the

form of the letter 'U' and held the shuttle in place by a pair of large magnets on the inside of the dock. The shuttle itself was naval blue in colour, had the shape of a wasp with a round window on each side to the front. As the Adjutant entered the shuttle, he seated himself and adjusted the driver seat for a comfortable position. He carried out a series of checks on the dashboards in front of him and above his head. Happy that the vehicle was ready for use, the Adjutant notified the General via email. He and the vehicle awaited further instructions.

Kern, looking forward to the covert viewing at the hospital dome, upon reading the email from his Adjutant moved with haste to the awaiting shuttle. Although a small vehicle there was plenty of room available. A man of Kern's height could walk around without risk of banging his head. Before sitting in the passenger seat, Kern gave the order for the Adjutant to take course for Hospital Dome 98. Although looking puzzled, the Adjutant raised no questions; and instead relayed the route order to the navigation console.

“Let's pull out” said the General in a non-formal manner.

The Adjutant pressed the 'Dock Release' button to deactivate the docking magnets, and afterwards took control of the shuttle's electric motor. He then followed the course coordinated by the navigation software. Watching his frail personal assistant command the shuttle, Kern was glad that the navigation software was in-sync with the auto-pilot. If many manual steering variations caused the vehicle to leave the set navigation course then the software activated the auto-pilot. Kern considered many-a-time to write a letter to the officers academy on recruiting standards as they needed to be tightened.

The shuttle's navigation console instructed the vehicle to approach the hospital dome via one of the network tunnels. Once in the tunnel, Kern instructed his assistant to switch off communication systems and bring the shuttle to a halt just before the dome entrance. Kern and his Adjutant left the parked vehicle.

But before entering the dome, Kern turned to his assistant and said “Adjutant, what you will witness is top secret and not for the public eye. Other species exist on this planet, of which you do not yet know. When we enter the dome stay by me and do not make any unnecessary moves as these may be misunderstood as an attack. Our visit today has a confidential purpose and so we need to make use of the moment of surprise, so please sharpen your tactical awareness for any sounds you make.”

The Adjutant, overwhelmed by fright, prepared himself for confronting an unknown nightmare – but not by preparing for attack, instead to cower just behind the General. As the pair of W.A.F officers entered the dome and little light was available, they still needed a few minutes for their eyes to adjust to the dark. The Adjutant followed his employer further into the dome. Kern headed towards the sounds of terrifying loud screams and the chopping of flesh, which both the men now heard.

At first, the Adjutant thought he saw a crocodile's tail, but he noted that the tail did not follow flat along the ground to the rest of the body. Instead it reached up past a pair of solid-muscled green scaled legs, to the back of a giant creature. The creature's spine was an external body part as hard as horn; and each section from the sides met at a raised point in the middle. *'Please don't turn around and face me'* the Adjutant thought to himself.

Unusual for Kern, a confident man with an aura of power; he first stood still as stone. He did not want to startle the reptilian soldier because the creature's reflexes controlled the bodily functions; and could fight Kern off as an attacker before he opened his mouth. Kern let out a loud hissing sound so that the soldier knew of his presence. The Adjutant looked at the General not believing what he was witnessing. The reptilian's tail propelled its body, which pivoted on the heels of its taloned feet for swift movement to either side. They could tell that the discovery of the hiss coming from a non-reptilian species, surprised it.

Kern addressed the soldier “Mighty soldier, I must first give you my compliments on the exemplary alertness. When I liaise with Larsst, the Commander, I must make sure you are rewarded. I am General Kern from the human World Administration Force and this man is my assistant.”

“Humanss!” shouted the reptilian as it went into a defence position and raised a wooden club in the air.

As it took reptilians longer to respond in oral communication, due to the brain processing incoming information at a slower speed to that of humans; this soldier did not at first realise that it had received a compliment on his guard duty. Reptilians held every given duty as an honour and deemed the personal family clan's reputation to be at risk if rendered work standards dropped. Kern registered that the reptilian had understood when it stood rigid, lowered the wooden club and

lifted a scaled chin.

“I wanted to pay my respect to Larsst, and value being escorted by expert soldiers.” Kern said as he looked at the reptilian.

The soldier waved to show they should follow him. Kern and the Adjutant followed the green battle veteran. Larsst had been overseeing the loading of sacks of human organs onto a vehicle when the soldier informed him that Kern and his assistant had arrived to pay him respect. Larsst knew Kern well enough to know that when reptilians collected human organ stock he did not visit. He thanked the soldier for its brave confrontation with these humans and recommended as a security measure the soldier called in a reptilian support team under his command.

“Kern, a pleasure to see you again so soon – what is the reason for your visit?” said Larsst.

Everywhere people panicked and ran. With loud gargling, screaming, shouting and the sound of chopping flesh and bone throughout the dome.

The General recalled a text script he had prepared and said “We had another meeting close by today. I remembered in my email to you, that I forgot to mention that the dome could be contaminated with the virus. So I thought we should visit you to point out this hazard. And I notice that your soldiers are not wearing protective clothing.”

Larsst commented “My dearest General, we appreciate the concern but we need not fear the virus.”

“How come?” asked Kern.

By now the escort reptilian's support team arrived and now surrounded the humans. The Adjutant noticed the blood and bits of body organs dripping and sliding off of the reptilians' scales.

Larsst explained “Firstly Kern, the chip virus is not dangerous for our race – because it was designed in our laboratory. Secondly, the virus was designed to destroy most materials but not earth – so it will destroy almost everything above the surface. The virus is designed to self-dissintegrate after six months.”

Even though Larsst's explanation was what Kern expected, it alarmed him. And now he was eager to learn why the reptilians wanted to destroy everything above ground.

Kern asked “But why, Larsst? Why destroy everything? And why now?”

“We have an agenda – and now the time has come for us to take

back what is ours by galactic law - the surface of this planet!  
While you are visiting, I can personally thank you for the previous  
business relationship we had – which has now ended.”

Larsst gave an order to the soldiers in reptilian language, which  
could not be understood by the men. Translated, the order was “Kill  
the humans and take the body organs – which I want to have served.”

Kern and the Adjutant did not have time to react before the club  
blows from behind rendered them unconscious. Within minutes just  
the remains of the hollowed bodies was on the floor and the human  
organs in a sack in transit to Larsst's personal lair.

## Chapter 15

Before moving out, it was promising for a day of sunshine – but by midday the heavens opened and quenched the thirst of the surrounding vegetation. Each member of the group donned a poncho, which covered themselves and the horses' backs. By early evening the group passed the defence dome and had the forest in sight. They settled on finding a suitable spot on the edge of the forest to make camp for the night.

Leo moved to the front to lead the group – his past military skills had now proven useful in finding a suitable camp location. The others noticed that Leo kept listening out for something though they did not know what. They reached the threshold between wasteland and forest and followed along the outer line of trees. Leo held up an arm as a signal to stop. He leaned to one side and listened again. And telling from his facial expression, he had found what he sought.

“Follow me” said Leo, and the rest of the group followed after him.

What Leo had searched for was a water source. Now they reached a stream, one hundred metres into the forest, they followed it. Soon they reached a curve of large rocks, each three metres high.

Leo informed the rest of the group “We should make camp at this spot.”

He chose this location because the stream provided clean fresh running water for themselves and the horses, and fish as food source. Plus the rocks gave protection from wind and hid them and the fire somewhat from view. Using the tarpaulins tucked behind the saddles, a shelter was built overhead from the top of the rocks and tied out to trees with rope. Relt hung out a few fishing lines and was proud of the catches he made. Later that evening, seated around the camp fire eating cooked fish; they found that for a short time they could relax and forget the current threat and the near impossible tasks ahead.

The next morning, over a cup of tea, Relt suggested “I reckon it might be sensible to keep this camp as our base, what do you think?”

Thorn said “Sounds good. In fact, I can go out on a reconnaissance patrol to the place I last saw the watcher. Jessica can come with me. Relt, you could put your skills to good use improving the camp, and with Leo and True hunting to supplement the provisions we took with us; it makes sense for you three to stay at the base.”

Jessica nodded her head in agreement. Leo was glad for a chance to

show off his gained hunting skills. And True was happy to stay with her brother and help out as necessary at the base camp.

Relt said “Well that is settled. I'll reinforce the shelter and arrange a series of spikes to keep the wolves at bay – last night they had crept even closer.”

Once they finished a short breakfast, with fresh motivation they went on with the tasks. Jessica and Thorn collected the rucksacks from the horses. They filled the canteens with water from the stream – Leo made sure that this camp location was up-stream to have access to clean water. They had plenty of oatmeal biscuits and beef jerky packed.

With the rucksacks kept lightweight, Jessica and Thorn made off on a reconnaissance trek. Near the edge of the forest, travel was slow with no man-made paths; with vegetation and undergrowth growing free and strong. During the journey Thorn described the watcher to Jessica.

“The search is for a species, which I assume dwell in the forest. Though I don't know if they live on ground level or up in the trees somewhere – so we must search everywhere.” Thorn explained.

Jessica asked “Okay, run the watcher profile by me again.”

“Note I only got a glimpse of the watcher myself, which was from a distance. I reckon that it was just over one metre in height. The skin was a pea-green colour and although the face had eyes, a nose and mouth as we have, I could swear that leaves grew out from the head. I noticed no ears because of the leaves, so it may have a pair, I'm just not sure though. As for the clothing, I'm not sure if it wore cloths or had fur as a dark green mossy material covered it.” Thorn said as they continued to try making progress by taking high steps over the green web of bushes, nettles and roots.

Upon recognising the defence dome he repaired recently and calculating the distance to it, Thorn could navigate to the location at which the watcher must have stood. He signalled by holding up a flat hand for them to stop. Off to the side and towards the inner forest, he spotted a tree with a series of low branches. Pointing to the tree he then climbed it and Jessica followed.

Thorn hoped that by hiding up in the tree they might stand a better chance of catching sight of one or more of these 'watchers' as he now called them. They each made themselves comfortable on a separate branch, which enabled them to rest against the green-stained bark of the main body of the tree. They must have been waiting for ninety

minutes before the sound of leaves being crushed broke the silence. Jessica heard the sounds first and tapped Thorn on the shoulder.

They made sure not to make any noise as they looked below at what approached. If either of them had any survival skills they might have got rid of the human scent before setting out on this journey. So neither of them understood why the stag stopped suddenly, sniffed at the air and the surrounding ground, and sprinted off deeper into the forest. Thorn exhaled a sigh of disappointment.

Jessica tapped his shoulder again, but she did not attract his attention this time as quick as she did before the animal arrived. So she tugged on his left jacket sleeve and when he reacted pointed to the being which was standing below at the foot of the tree; who's approach they had not noticed. As they both looked towards the ground they saw just the dull green leaves which grew out of the head and body. The leaves must have been three millimetres thick and rough nettle form.

The watcher placed a four-digit hand against the bark of the tree and stayed in that position for sixty seconds before lowering the arm again. Jessica and Thorn looked puzzled at each other and shrugged shoulders, confirming they did not know what the watcher did. Shocked, Jessica just managed to keep her balance on her branch as the watcher arched its neck up and looked at them both. It was Thorn's turn to be shocked when the watcher spoke in English.

“Ah, the dome repairman I believe?” the being said in a croaky voice.

Thorn realised that it had meant him, as it had stared back at him when he carried out repair work on the defence dome.

Pleased that the being did not show aggression, Thorn said “Yes, that's me. My name is Thorn, and she is my close friend Jessica.”

“Pleased to make the acquaintance, Jessica and Thorn. I am known as Mulrog. Do you intend to stay up the tree long? You need to understand that the tree is not too happy if the young branches are blocked from the sun-rays.”

Feeling guilty and puzzled, Jessica and Thorn descended the tree. Once on the ground, they got a closer look at Mulrog's face and body front. It had a jolly and peaceful looking pea-green face, large nostrils but thin lips. Over the chest and stomach was a dark green mossy fur. Without actual clothing, that it was of masculine gender was obvious. His legs muscle-bound but short. His feet, each with five digits, had small roots running along the sides.



As a greeting gesture, Thorn stretched his arm out and opened his hand. Mulrog's facial expression explained that after first remembering human mannerisms, he could he go ahead with shaking Thorn's hand. Full of questions, Jessica had to control herself though, and choose which one should be asked first.

"Mulrog, how did you know that we had been up the tree?" she asked.

"Jessica, we connect to every living thing, for example the trees in the forest; many being on Earth before mankind. By touching the tree with my hand earlier, I could tune into the frequency and have a short conversation with it, without spoken words. The tree told me it had a pair of unwelcome guests squatting on branches, who had blocked the sun-rays. Sun-rays being vital for health and well-being. This tree has been here since the day I became a watcher of the forest, one hundred years ago." Mulrog explained.

Thorn said to Mulrog "I bet you cannot work out what we're doing, up a tree in this forest so far away from the dome network?"

Mulrog said "You seek help! The network destroyed by a force you cannot stop. The human race is in danger of extinction. A force which has been on Earth for millions of years and preparing for this onslaught for the last five centuries; they are the reptilians!"

"You're correct Mulrog. The only reason Jessica and I came into the woods was to find you. We're now part of the old breed settlement away from the dome network. We'd been able to escape a reptilian attack in a hospital dome. And an unstoppable virus is now causing devastation, consuming material and soon the whole global dome network will no longer exist. We're aware that we need to do something quick to save mankind. And although we don't know what, it's understood that we'll need guidance and help." Thorn explained.

"Follow me to our village. Please be our guests, liaise with our elders and discuss the threat that concerns everyone." said Mulrog.

Thorn said "Thank you. Although I believe that the threat just concerns us, so I don't want to place anyone else in unnecessary danger."

Mulrog added "Thorn, I am afraid that none of you know everything this threat entails, hence why I watched you repair the dome the other day; and why I now want our elders to liaise with you both."

Jessica and Thorn followed on behind Mulrog. As he led them deeper into the forest, the going got tougher for the pair of humans as

they had no permanent paths to follow. As Mulrog's feet touched the ground and his feet-feelers waved out touching the unmoved undergrowth, he walked through with ease. But the humans, having to untangle feet to move forward, made slow progress. As the three of them moved on, the green haze around them got thicker until the point at which they had reached a threshold; where daylight from above filtered through to ground level.

Jessica and Thorn kept looking up into the trees but saw nothing. After a while they ignored the fact that something was watching and concentrated on keeping up with Mulrog. Mulrog stopped so abrupt that Jessica and Thorn, still in forward momentum, just missed knocking him to the floor. Without explaining his next move, Mulrog pivoted left and stepped into a large hollow tree.

*'Great.'* thought Thorn *'Now we have to squeeze up inside a tree!'*

But Thorn found he was wrong in a pleasant sense as they followed Mulrog who descended a stairway which was not viewable outside the entrance. The smell of damp and dry wood hit his nostrils – the mixed odour somewhat refreshing. The spiral stairway ended thirty metres below the forest surface. Light came from a complex network of hollow roots, which led up to the top of the canopy trees; through which the sun-rays could reach the forest dwellers' village.

And a village it was as they were to discover during the guided tour they received. As one expected to find above ground but instead thirty metres underground, lanes, houses and even a village hall was present. Jessica was so excited with this enchanted place, that for a moment she left behind the worries she had carried along with her. So overwhelming was this village built within and by the roots of the majestic trees. Villagers soon came to see who the watcher had invited into the secret kingdom. Jessica waved and smiled at a few of them who then returned the gesture.

Once they had arrived at the centre of the village, Mulrog invited them both to take a seat. The wooden chairs encircled an extraordinary large round table, with legs which grew out of the ground and a top made from hundreds of thick pebbles; ground flat and smooth. Jessica and Thorn now seated, watched as Mulrog disappeared up one of the thin dirt lanes. Ten minutes later Mulrog returned, along with ten of the 'Elders'. Each of the elders wore a wafer-thin decorative wooden necklace which covered the whole chest.

Although they looked the same as Mulrog, the elders must have

been twice as old – which made them a few hundred years of age. Out of courtesy, Jessica and Thorn rose as they approached the table and waited for the elders to be seated. Mulrog, with his excellent command of the English language, acted as translator at this meeting.

“I briefed our elders based on what you told me. Any other details either of you might wish to add at this stage?” he asked.

Thorn said “Well we found out that the wrist chips triggered the virus, which was part of the reptilian agenda. And that the World Administration Force had been in collaboration with the reptilians because for example the tunnels no longer accessed the hospital dome; with people left inside the dome to be butchered by those monsters.”

Mulrog translated for the elders. The elders passed a reply for him to translate back into English.

“Our elders wish I tell you both what we have been observing, the threat as we understand it and how we prepared ourselves. Many hundreds of years ago, when the human race still fought with swords, it was a time of sacrifice and barbaric rituals. The birth of religion to control people by fear. Fear of the unknown, of the wrath of gods and devils. This power and control was part of an agenda; one drafted by a species that ruled the surface of the Earth thousands of years ago: The reptilian race!” Mulrog explained.

After allowing a few minutes for this information to sink in, he said “For centuries members of governments and elite society, though many times unknowing; found themselves in positions of power for one reason: primed from early age. And it was common for a whole family bloodline continued generation after generation to appear in such positions. Most humans belonged to a religion, but the gods had been of this world and took a most horrible and evil form.

Now is not the first try from the reptilians to steal back terrestrial control of planet Earth. But each time throughout the centuries they tried, although becoming more and more cunning in the planning, they failed during the invasions. A species which had not developed intelligence as they evolved, the reptilians realised that because humans had been inventing better weaponry; that they needed to concentrate on controlling the leaders to weaken the human race. And once the majority of humans became docile enough, they could conquer with no retaliation.”

A short interval took place as the forest folk served refreshments of salad and tea.

Mulrog started at the part he left off from earlier “Trees reported to us that there was an increase in deep underground movement. That the reptilians have been expanding a tunnel network at a rapid pace around the globe. This confirmed to us what we feared, that the day when reptilians ruled the Earth's surface again was soon to arrive. That the reptilians roamed free under the sky again, was in the visions of our ancestors many many years ago. Wise calculations and planning survived many generations of our folk. And we are most fortunate that the trees in the forests we dwell in, together with nature itself, helped us form mother-ships – living vehicles. Many being thousands of years old.”

Thorn, looking around asked “Whereabouts? Is the mother-ship at this location?”

“You are in it! I will show you below later. Now that the reptilian agenda has sped up at a rate even our folk had underestimated, we now need to re-consider our own plans. And for the information you have given us we are most grateful.” said Mulrog.

Jessica added “Mulrog, what is the plan if I may ask?”

Mulrog explained “Well, although we have our mother-ships, we are not ready for the next part of our plan; which is to create a vortex and migrate to another planet, the one which I understand you humans call Mars.”

Jessica looked at Thorn and he returned the glance. Even having considered that this idea is not imaginable, the pair's sub-consciousness had just told them that this solved the problem.

Unable to cope with such far-fetched data for his brain to work with, Thorn interrupted and said “Excuse me Mulrog but you must understand. Although I'm an open chap and have faced what to me was unknown; a migration to Mars and vortexes are a level above me and need to be better explained.”

Mulrog translated now for the elders. The elders spoke with Mulrog and he prepared to translate back once again “The elders gave me permission to share with you our plan in more detail. Without further explanation I understand that it may be difficult for you to follow. We own a skill, which every human has too – although not yet trained, to use body energy to travel and move things inter-dimensional through a vortex. Again, without practice you no doubt might consider this an unbelievable skill to achieve. A vortex is a tunnel filled with energy which turns in a spiral motion and opens and closes. To use such a

vortex it may disagree with time and travel as you know it now. Vortexes open and close regularly around the planet, and under the proper conditions we intend to open one and travel through it with the first mother-ship. As I said, we are at a dead end. We now seek a method to overcome a few obstacles.”

Thorn asked “So what are the obstacles?”

Mulrog explained “Well first, although we have had training in opening a vortex, we still need to work out how to transport the mother-ship ship through it. Second, for the mother-ship we need to make sure continual conditions as on Earth, as they are important for the trees; from which the roots form the ship base and body. Thorn, this was the reason I observed you while you repaired the dome. I thought that the material you used to fix the dome might solve a problem we now face. Which is to offer a damp environment for the tree roots and daylight, darkness, and rain for the tree bodies above ground.”

Jessica added “Mulrog, if we help you with the migration plan, may we, I mean the old breed people; migrate together with the forest folk?”

Mulrog translated again the conversation content for the elders and awaited the response. After the elders had discussed matters among themselves, they signalled to Mulrog for him to go ahead with the translation to English.

“The elders consent to the old breed people migrating together with our folk. We ask one condition to this though. Because the migration might be successful if we first solve a few problems, those wishing to migrate are to work together. Our forest mother-ship will be the first to migrate and if successful others can follow. Organisation is important, and we have to start work now to solve the remaining problems. Thorn, we want you to stay and together with myself and a few others concentrate on making our mother-ship ready for the migration. Jessica, four of our female sentry guards will escort you back and stay with you until you and the old breed people return.” explained Mulrog.

Jessica and Thorn agreed with Mulrog and the elders. Members of the forest folk came out from mud and root homes, each bringing different food they had prepared. Within a short time the large village centre table was full of food and drink. And the empty chairs filled quick and everyone enjoyed a hearty meal. Jessica got introduced to the small group of sentry guards, and after she had received a good-

bye hug from Thorn; moved out with her escorts, heading back to the base camp.

Thorn turned to Mulrog and said “Mulrog, if you could go through the list and confirm what is needed, afterwards we can discuss solutions. For example we could start with considering how the sealant could be used.”

“Yes.” said Mulrog, and continued “I will introduce you later to our team, who's responsibility is nursing the tree roots beneath this level. And watch the growth and shaping of the roots to form the floor and walls. A waterproof basin is needed below the roots, and maybe for this we can use what you call 'sealant'. The sealant might solve the problem we face, in creating a protective dome to cover the whole mother-ship. But this might need more thought.”

Finishing off herb bread and chopped nuts dip, Thorn asked “So what purpose will the protective dome serve?”

Mulrog said “First, the dome needs to serve as an air-tight lid on the mother-ship and protect it during and after the vortex journey. Our survival on Mars will first depend on us having an indoor environment the same as on Earth. And by allowing leaks of air and perforating the sealant basin for the tree roots to grow through, we hope to make the surface of Mars habitable.”

Thorn gave this task serious thought and considered a plan, to build a dome frame of the required size; and a source to get enough sealant for the task. If the World Administration could make thousands of domes, then judging by what these forest folk built without modern technology; a mother-ship dome might soon be in the making.

Motivated by his own imagination, Thorn explained “I'd say we have little choice, so must find a method for the plan to work. For the dome we'll need a giant wooden web frame constructed, and on it we'll affix sealant slabs which we'll mould together. The slabs will have wooden handles on the inner side to enable connection to the frame. Once the slabs are in place, the joints can be sealed. I've given the sealant stock thought and suggest that you and I both go and take a look at the nearest supply depot; to the north of the defence dome. The one on which you seen me carrying out repair work. By foot we should reach the depot within a day. Once we arrive we must find a method of securing a continual direct supply to this mother-ship. If you can now show me below at the level the 'root' team are on, I can make notes for making the basin.”

With excitement Mulrog led his guest back to the stair-well from which they had descended. Neither Jessica nor Thorn had given thought before to the fact that the stairs continued below the 'village' level at which they entered. The stairs ended one metre in front of a thick small door. To follow Mulrog through the doorway Thorn had to duck and was glad to straighten back up once on the other side. On this lowest level of the mother-ship, being below the tree roots felt as if the whole planet was above them. Mulrog introduced him to the crew who

Thorn referred to earlier as the 'root' team. They wore long fur coats to combat this damp level. Mulrog and Thorn received similar coats for the tour duration.

Accompanied by the root team, Mulrog gave Thorn a guided tour and said "You can view how, as the roots continue to grow; they go between this pair of large wooden columns which form a press. As the roots become flattened out from the press, they continue to grow either into the purpose-built wall or floor frame above our heads." he explained pointing upwards.

Inspecting this amazing construction, Thorn asked "So how does the root team make sure that the roots are nourished, once exposed to air and light in this part?"

"I am glad you asked that." said Mulrog and continued "Between the floor and wall frame panels, through which the roots grow; is the best quality earth and water supplied through a pipeline from a rain reservoir."

Thorn's pieces of his plan now came together in his mind and once the guided tour was over, he discussed a few suggested tasks.

"Mulrog, before we both embark on our journey, can the forest folk help with tasks here? When Jessica returns with the members of the old breed settlement they can help too. For the basin a mould frame needs to be built for the root walls and floor, in which to pour the sealant mix. And for the dome slabs, again a mould frame needs to be built – this one though should be hexagon shaped with a width of one metre. Slab handles can go into production too. If timber is available and the trees allow such a sacrifice, I suggest that slices to be cut ten centimetres thick from timber twenty centimetres wide. Each slice cut in the middle and hollowed out to four centimetres remaining, will make a pair of crescent handles." instructed Thorn.

Mulrog confirmed that he could now organise the tasks to be worked on at the carpentry workshop. He asked Thorn to follow him

to the village storeroom, to collect what they needed to take on the journey – the quest for a sealant supply. As Thorn packed provisions in his rucksack, he still battled with himself on how the basin perforations might work; the holes just being needed once the mother-ship reached the destination. And even at that stage they wanted to control the sequence in which they are opened. He knew that the holes had to be made and plugged before the sealant mix got added into the basin mould and hardened. On a shelf in the village store room, piles of pots and large cork bungs could be seen. Thorn now had an idea for a solution for the basin perforations.

He asked Mulrog “Those cork bungs on that shelf. Can you organise enough to be made, to use to block the basin perforations?”

Mulrog said “Yes I am sure we can get enough produced. We will make each one with a wooden handle so they can be extracted with ease once we have migrated.”

“Great. Also, make the tips of the bungs heat-protective using sealant.” Thorn added.

Leo, Relt and True paused from the tasks back at the base camp, so they could prepare the evening meal. The hunt was successful and so they made a stew. They had used a few of the vegetables and potatoes they had stored in rucksacks. Relt had the fire going and filled a pot with water which now hung over the flames. Leo prepared the rabbit while True diced the vegetables and potatoes. Relt added a few pinches of salt other herbs into the water pot as the other pair added the prepared ingredients.

“I hope there's a spare bowl for me!” said Jessica as she and her escorts approached the cosy looking base camp.

Concerned that Thorn was not with her and puzzled by the presence of the escorts with Jessica, True asked “But what.... what happened to Thorn? And who are they? Are you under arrest?”

Jessica smiled at True to reassure her and gestured with an open hand for her escorts to take a seat around the fire; at which Leo, Relt and True were present.

To dissolve an uncomfortable hostile atmosphere, Relt said “I'm sure that Jessica will tell us what happened. And to our guests, welcome to our humble camp, please join us for a meal. My name is Relt, his is Leo, and hers is True.”

Once the stew was ready Relt served everyone a bowl full each, apart from Jessica's escorts; who declined the offer once they saw that



the stew content was not just vegetarian. Relt realised that the escorts must be vegetarian and offered them oat biscuit sticks which they took and consumed. Leo, Relt and True now looked over at Jessica, eager to listen to her story.

Jessica felt them looking at her, and as she had finished her stew; placed her bowl next to her and said “These brave ladies are forest folk guards and had received orders to protect me on my return journey. I'm here on a mission: To relay a message and task. Thorn is well and volunteered to stay at the village. As you can no doubt gather, we found the watcher. And once we had explained the purpose of our visit he, Mulrog, invited us back to the underground village, and we met with the elders. We learned more of the reptilian agenda, that is centuries old; and how the forest folk had been growing a mother-ship of trees that serves as a village. The message is that the elders have consented to the old breed and children we rescue, joining them on the intended migration journey. The condition is that we help them prepare and overcome the many hurdles that lie ahead. So Thorn has joined a team that will investigate possible solutions. My task is to organise the move of everyone and return with everyone to the forest as soon as possible. I'll explain in a minute how the forest folk intend to migrate. As for the move to the forest, Relt do you think you can gather everyone in the settlement together for an announcement to be made? Most know, and will listen to you. We'll not force anyone to come with us. Once we're back in the forest, Relt, you and I need to liaise with Mulrog; and together discuss how to communicate with other old breed settlements and folk in other mother-ship forests. The aim is for the mother-ship we'll be on, to migrate first and for others to follow later.”

Relt, having finished another helping of stew, said “Yes, sure I can Jessica; if there's enough information to answer the questions. As for communication with our other settlements, we have pigeons – old fashioned but reliable. I'll make sure we take them with us – maybe the forest folk have similar methods of communication?”

Leo continued serving helpings of stew to those still hungry as plenty was still in the pot. He could not help but stare at Jessica's forest escorts in wonder, at just how nature adapted this species to a life in a forest environment; with the main feature being the leaves which grew on the folks' heads. These leaves must be made of skin but leathery as a bat's wing.

Jessica continued “From what we had explained to us, it was obvious to the elders that the matter of the reptilian agenda was more serious. They knew for hundreds of years that the reptilians intended to retrieve control of Earth's surface. But considered the threat still low because the reptilians had been working to a plan to manipulate and control humans in leadership positions. Now though the elders decided the migration needs to happen. It's intended that the forest mother-ship travels through an energy vortex to the planet Mars. I understand this sounds weird and believe me it did to us too. I'm sure you'll agree we've got to be open to unexplored possibilities if we want to survive as a race. But how vortex travelling works I'm not sure yet. We'll find out in due course though.”

They appeared to make a telepathic agreement that an interval was due, to take in this fresh information and consider just what mammoth-scale tasks lay ahead of them. As they remained seated in silence watching the flames, Relt took another metal round pot; filled it with water and hooked it over the fire to prepare a brew of tea for them. Once boiled, the water got poured into an aluminium tea-pot. In the tea-pot a bed of dry tea leaves caught the landing liquid, and the brewing began. With everyone holding a cup of hot tea, they now picked up the conversation again.

True asked “Well, although we know we should start with the settlement move, I imagine it will be a large logistical feat. Another point is, apart from the move, has anyone thought on how to rescue children from the education centre? Jessica, I recall that the suggestion came from you originally?”

“Yes I suggested it, but to be honest; I have no idea how to do such a rescue.” Jessica said.

The group fell silent because they now understood this part of the original plan had no foundation and needed to be approached from fresh. Each of them now pondered over the task – could it be done? At which location were they to start? More and more unanswered questions arose for consideration.

Again Relt took the initiative and got the conversation thread weaving again “Okay, we need to answer a few basic questions; to decide if we can manage a rescue task of this scale.”

Leo added “I reckon that it may be possible to do the rescue during the move of the old breed from the settlement to the forest folk village.”

Now that ideas flowed, morale had risen again and a picture of the plan roll-out took form in another dimension out of physical view.

“In theory great but one important thing is still missing, we need to locate the education centre in this zone. So we can calculate the distance to the forest and consider transportation.” True said.

Jessica arose from her dark well of thought, sparked by the glimpse of hope True had just given to her with the somewhat vague child rescue suggestion.

Relt asked True “So from which education centre did they come? Did the hospital only treat children from the one centre?”

“Well the centre is not easy to locate as I recall from a chat I had with staff one day over a cup of tea. From the air one could fly over a centre without noticing it because apparently the roofs are covered by a grass hump to camouflage it as a hilltop. Amenities and other facilities, including supplies are underground. They do not allow the children contact with the outside world.” Explained True.

Leo added “I reckon they are well prepared against intruders from above ground. So maybe we could make use of the underground network.”

True suggested “We could try the same method which we used to escape from the hospital dome – through the refuse disposal tube. We know they must lead outside at a point.”

“Entering in the first place might be harder than escaping afterwards. It calls for the highest level of tactical skills, ensuring that our entrance goes unnoticed. Another thing to consider is evacuating the children – they’ll be scared and dis-orientated.” Leo added.

The group fell back into silence again to ponder over this section of the plan. They forgot their guests in attendance, who remained quiet and sipped away at cups of tea. The forest sentry guards stood up, whispered to each other and after they agreed upon something, one placed her cup on the ground and addressed the group.

“Jessica, you may recall that our elders said that everyone has to work together for the migration. So we now offer to help you with rescuing the children. Our senses are not just more sharper, but we can place any being into a trance state. This works against any non-cooperative personnel at the centre, and in calming the children for the evacuation.” explained the guard nominated as speaker for them.

After discussing the plan in more detail, night had crept in around them hinting that it was time to sleep; as Relt had to speak to the old

breed the next day. Together with Jessica and three of the sentry guards, he was to lead those willing to migrate back to the forest. Leo, True and the other sentry guard were to find the education centre, rescue the children and head back to the forest. True had estimated that the centre should be somewhere between the defence dome facing the forest and the hospital dome from which they had escaped.

## Chapter 16

Thorn wished that the forest folk rode horses, instead they always walked barefoot; and connected to nature through the feet-feelers. This meant hiking - not his preferred method of travel. So it was clever of Mulrog to repack the rucksacks, making sure that the heavier items were at the top – which they might appreciate during the journey.

Once past the defence dome heading north, Thorn took a glimpse back at the dome which he had invested so much effort in repairs; and tapped Mulrog's shoulder to signal he too should look. The whole side of the dome was now partially transparent, with piles of crumbled debris surrounding the base. The inner platform was now in view and evidently had not survived the attacking virus; which ate through the main column causing the platform to tilt to one side towards the ground. With no-one in sight Thorn visualized what happened, people butchered by reptilian forces; with the human parts stored somewhere deep below the Earth's crust.

Thorn felt commentary due and said “That is how dangerous the virus is, spreading at a fast rate. Let's hope we're just not too late.”

With no verbal agreement, they both increased the pace of walking. They needed to reach the supply depot by the nightfall. Mulrog was the first to notice the group of colossal blue round storage vats, towering at least fifty metres up in the air, off in the distance to the front. They guessed that at least ten vats provided the supply, each being one hundred metres wide. Being isolated from the dome network, the virus had not reached this location.

Mulrog asked “Have you considered how we are supposed to get a continual supply of the sealant?”

“I've got a plan in my head, but we need to confirm how the sealant is supplied to the defence dome; by pipeline or container.” explained Thorn.

They continued to head towards the group of tanks, and Thorn continued to scan the surrounding areas for a place to use as an observation post. As they got as close as they dared, to the left of them Thorn noticed a rock ridge protruding from a bush line. They moved to the ridge as quick as possible. It was ideal as they could see the entrance to the supply depot from behind the bush line. Although by evening there was much movement of workers between buildings on the industrial estate, nothing got transported anywhere.

After eating snacks they had packed, Thorn suggested “Mulrog, I'm positive that the sealant is supplied via pipeline. The confusing part for me though is, in the storage room of the hospital dome from which Jessica and I made our stand against the reptilians; the sealant was in barrels.”

“Hmm... how many barrels had been in the storage room?” asked Mulrog.

Thinking back, Thorn said “I reckon five or six barrels.”

Mulrog said “In that case, and considering the size of the domes, I say the barrels were an emergency supply; and the main one is as you suggested by pipeline.”

“That might explain why the sealant needed to be mixed before use.” said Thorn.

They both agreed the next thing to do was locate the pipeline, and to do this they should travel back towards the defence dome. As the pipeline was underground it was probable it survived the virus outbreak. Once they found the pipeline, Mulrog intended to return to the forest and have a team build a tree root pipeline; the same as the ones used for the air supply to the village.

As they returned to the defence dome, Thorn felt fatigued from walking under the blazing sun-rays. So they made a stop in the shade provided by a lone tree with a majestic skirt of long branches. Thorn looked at the palms of his hands for a while, which Mulrog noticed.

“What is wrong Thorn?” asked Mulrog.

“Oh, nothing, everything is fine. I'm just admiring my hands, knowing after digging for the pipeline my palms will be full of blisters. Do you realise the ground will be dry and hard?” Thorn explained.

Mulrog smiled and said “You forget that we forest folk are at one with nature – do you think we built our village with shovels alone? No my friend, you will witness many benefits of such oneness – the ability of which lies in every living being, including yourself.”

They continued with the return journey at a gruelling speed. Thorn now appreciated just how hard Leo's military training must have been. As soon as the defence dome came into sight he stopped and removed the shovel strapped to the side of his rucksack. As Thorn went to shift the first layer of earth from the spot which he wanted to check, to try to locate the pipeline; Mulrog snapped the shovel away from him and put it to one side.

Mulrog explained to Thorn “Thorn, before you start to dig, sit and watch that space on the ground.”

Thorn did as Mulrog asked and seated himself on a patch of dried yellow grass; to view the spot where he wanted to dig. Mulrog now stepped onto the same spot and stood with his feet thirty centimetres apart. He now closed his eyes and went into a state of meditation. Thorn noticed that the feelers around Mulrog's feet had started to wave in the air and as if worms, search below for the ground. As the feelers touched the ground they wriggled between the dry crumbs of dirt until they could go no more; at which stage Mulrog's feet anchored tight to the ground. In this state of meditation trance, Mulrog stayed for at least sixty minutes – but in reality he had returned to consciousness and opened his eyes after just fifteen.

Pointing with his hand to one metre eastwards, Mulrog said to Thorn “Follow my hand my friend. The earth below was most cooperative and happy to divulge to me the exact spot under which the pipeline runs. Dig, but be careful when at fifty centimetres as you should have reached the pipeline.”

Thorn was still not convinced Mulrog's estimated location of the pipeline had been correct, but trusted his friend; and dug as requested. Due to the sun-rays roasting the back of his neck, Thorn hoped Mulrog was correct and more holes may not be necessary. Once the hole measured forty centimetres deep, Thorn reduced the digging to a mere scraping motion with the shovel. As both of them heard a tap sound as metal touched metal, Thorn looked up and saw Mulrog's wide grin. Thorn shook his head, but not in a negative sense – he was smiling, which broke into laughter as he found Mulrog's *'Told you so'* grin so funny. Once they shifted the dirt, they both stood and looked at the top curve of the black metal pipe.

Mulrog announced “Now we found the pipeline, I will head back to the forest. I shall return with a carpenter team, provisions and tools. You might be wise to make camp over by that tree which hangs over the stream. You will have water and shade. As night sets in beware of wolves. I will go as far as to recommend that you stay up in the tree. I will check with the tree.”

They both walked over to the tree and Mulrog placed both palms of his hands on the tree bark, closed his eyes and focused on the forthcoming conversation. Thorn felt awkward standing around doing nothing while Mulrog had his chat with the perennial, so he pulled out

his water canteen and filled it from the river. Mulrog joined after a short while.

Thorn asked in a sarcastic manner “So what did you and the tree discuss hmm?”

Mulrog noticed and understood Thorn's sarcasm because for humans it was hard to get away from restricted beliefs.

“I am glad you asked. We discussed recent local happenings, including the dome network virus, reptilians and the pipeline. The tree confirmed that much movement and tunnelling has happened underground. The pipeline does stretch the whole distance to the dome. Oh and the Tree consents to you staying overnight and recommends that somewhat flat branch for your bed. The one condition being you make sure you extinguish the fire before climbing up the tree for the night.” Mulrog explained.

Thorn wished that Mulrog had not spoken to the tree because now sleeping in a tree, knowing that it is alive and can communicate; will be a strange experience for him. To be truthful though, he was yet to sleep in a tree, so could not compare. Without further delay, Mulrog waved to Thorn and began his journey back to the forest. Thorn took a handful of rounded stones from the river bank and placed them in a circle, to serve as his fireplace.

With the stones still wet, he was still confident he might start his fire. Due to the sunny period it should not be a problem finding bits and pieces to use as tinder. Ample old dead twigs and branches lay upon on the ground, which he could use without having a guilty conscience. After cooking up vegetables he had packed, Thorn dowsed the fire and climbed up the branches of the tree; until he reached the one recommended to him. To his surprise the branch had a dip in it which was flat and wide. Fatigued, sleep came to Thorn within minutes of settling for the night.

Mulrog continued with no stops, back to the forest. Upon arrival he met with the head carpenter and over a meal which the head carpenter's wife served, they discussed the requirements for the root pipeline. He slept while the head carpenter organised a team of carpenters, and a few from other trades. A few hours was just what Mulrog needed to awake fit and fresh. The team who prepared the materials, joined him and had with them the tools of the various trades.

From the basin below the village, the forest folk joined pieces of root pipeline together and sealed with tree resin. They repeated this



procedure over and over again as they worked towards Thorn's direction. While the forest folk worked they did not chat as they understood what the task required and time was not on their side.

Although just a blanket covered Thorn, he received warmth from the tree; which made his perch a cosy place to sleep. He guessed it was the tree's vibrations which made him so tired.

He woke to the sounds of birds on the higher branches of the tree. He complained to himself that out in the wilds, not a living thing was allowed to stay asleep after a pre-arranged time. Before climbing to the ground, Thorn had a strange urge to place his hand on the tree bark and thank it for providing him with a bed for the night. Although he did not know how to communicate with the tree as Mulrog did, he just spoke and hoped that the tree might respond. On the ground, Thorn started a fire; and boiled water for a tea and small breakfast. He only noticed how the temperature had dropped during the night as he started to build the fire.

Once he finished his breakfast, he extinguished the fire, and packed his rucksack. A short while afterwards, in the distance he heard the chopping of wood and the hollow clang that pieces of wood made when dropped. Thorn now stood over on the track next to hole he had made to access the sealant pipeline. With slight cupped hands against the sides of his face, he strained his eyes to view what had caused the commotion. Whereupon he spotted them. The green folk of the forest constructing the root pipeline at an amazing rate.

At once he headed towards the approaching pipe construction team. After greeting Mulrog he made a brief introduction to everyone in the team. Thorn then helped where he could, from hulling pieces of root from piles placed and replenished by carpenters in the forest; to sealing pipe joints with handfuls of gold coloured resin. By midday the root pipeline was complete, up to the hole in which the sealant pipeline lay.

The hole needed to be widened for work to start connecting the pipelines. With a stone-bit hand-drill, they drilled a hole through the top of the metal pipeline. And with minimal sealant and pressure escaping into open air they fitted a tree root connector, carved for this purpose; into place connecting the pipelines. The hole got filled, and as they returned to the forest covered the root pipeline with grass turf. Back below the forest village, they watched as the sealant worked around the mould. A wooden tap fitted to the end of the root pipeline

made it possible to stop the sealant pouring after the mould filled.

## Chapter 17

The group said farewell, knowing that when they next met up they will either be cheering over the success of the plan; or if one or both parts failed at a sad re-union. Jessica, Relt embarked on horseback, with the three sentry guards to foot, on their mission to meet the old breed and return to the forest with those who wished to migrate. Leo, True and the other sentry guard headed out without horses, towards the estimated location the education centre. The aim to rescue the children and return to the forest.

As the 'old breed' party arrived back at the settlement container network, Relt wasted no time in getting a message throughout the settlement for a gathering that evening. In his message he mentioned that he had answers to many of the questions on recent happenings. Relt took Jessica and the sentries up the ramp and showed them to their living quarters and later called for them when lunch was ready. The sentries received meals containing a mixture of vegetables and herbs. As evening came, Relt arranged for a row of tables and chairs to be placed out on the marketplace, and for armed security around the whole settlement. The threat was not from within the settlement, so this security measure protected everyone. Soon members of the old breed arrived, by foot, horse and self-made solar vehicles. Relt allowed time for the stragglers to arrive. And for those waiting, fresh water, bread and fruit was available.

Relt looked at Jessica and the sentry guards and asked “Are you ready? Let me talk first please – they may be shocked at first, being confronted with our escort sentries, so I hope they'll first listen to my explanation. Please jump in afterwards to answer questions.” Relt asked.

A nod of heads confirmed to Relt that they could now confront the old breed. The five proceeded off of the ramp and pushed through the crowd, towards the chairs and tables Relt had prepared. A series of mumbles and murmuring started as people needed to make room for the fellow humans and something else to pass through the crowd mass.

In front of the row of tables, those attending had left a three metre space; as if a secret rule regulated the distance between the tables and first row of people. As the five arrived behind the chairs, each pulled one out and once seated dragged the chair in so that legs and feet hid under the tables.

Relt commenced with his speech to the old breed “Members of the old breed, I appreciate you responding to my call at such short notice. I have answers to questions on recent happenings at the newer breed's dome network. I bring tidings – both negative and positive. But before I start, I ask that you listen with an open mind.”

A shout came from the crowd “What's with the suspense you old dog? Whatever you have to tell - you'd better hope that we consider it worthy of our loss of work time!”

Relt had prepared for such remarks and continued “Now, now. Everyone knows that I'm just as hard a worker as anyone else. Listen to me please and fire your questions afterwards.”

With the audience now silent, it was the prompt for Relt to go ahead, and without interruption he hoped.

“Everyone has no doubt seen what has happened recently to the newer breed's domes?” Relt asked.

The heads of many of the listeners nodded. And although listening to Relt, the glazes directed at the forest sentry guards.

Relt continued “Well, a virus has spread, or should I say, eaten throughout the dome network, leaving behind empty shells of what once was a colossal establishment. This virus isn't accidental. It got launched to collapse the World Administration and their global power.”

As Relt took a sip from a cup of water, a mass of cheering came from the crowd.

Placing his cup on the table, Relt waved his arms to signal for the cheering to cease and said “Wait, please let me continue. I know that the news sounds positive for our settlement, and under different circumstances it was. But the virus is part of an agenda, from beings that have been sharing this planet with us for thousands of years; with us being above surface and them underground. This lady, Jessica is her name, has fought in combat against these creatures; they're just as alive as you and I. Today we returned from a journey that took us deep into a forest. During our stay in the forest we discovered a different, friendly race. They are the forest watchers, and have been preparing for centuries, knowing that the day will come when the reptilians will carry out the final phase of a secret agenda. The agenda to reclaim power above the surface of the Earth. These ladies are forest watchers, guard sentries who accompanied us back.”

One member of the settlement asked “What of the newer breed? I

haven't seen any survivors running to us for safety! And if true, how are we threatened?"

Relt looked at Jessica and asked "Do you now wish to continue?"

Jessica stood up and looked at the crowd before proceeding "Hi, I got trapped in one of the elevator capsules in the hospital dome. The World Administration force had sealed the tunnels, so that nobody escaped. They had an arrangement with the reptilians, because once they closed the dome, the reptilians came up from below and butchered every human in sight; placed the body parts in sacks and transported them on vehicles through deep underground tunnels. I doubt that any of the newer breed survived and if they did they couldn't live long out of a dome environment. Any newer breed who turns to us will be welcome to join. We have a team at the moment attempting to rescue the children from one of the newer breed's education centres."

Relt took over again "It's just a question of time now until the reptilians complete the final agenda part. We've no idea how large the reptilian race is. One thing we do know though is that reptilians don't intend to share the Earth's surface with us. The forest folk intend to migrate, away from this planet. After meeting with them we convinced them to take our people with them – those who wish to go. We left a man back at the forest to help solve the problems obstructing the final construction of the mother-ship. The one condition the folk had is that those of us who wish to migrate with them help get the mother-ship ready for transportation as time is short."

Someone else in the crowd asked "But how many of us have the technical know-how required for building a spaceship?"

They looked surprised as one of the sentry guards stood up from her chair to answer this question.

She explained "For our mother-ship, technology is not required. We started to build it a long time ago. The mother-ship is our village as well.

You are most welcome to join us. We acknowledge that we cannot migrate alone, we need help and it will be an extreme honour for us to work with every one of you and travel together."

Another person asked "To which location do you intend migrating and how?"

The sentry guard explained "We intend to migrate to Mars. We will use inter-dimensional travel and for this there will be training. It will

involve using the energy produced and emitted by the vibrations of those travelling. This migration will be an exciting experience for us too.”

Relt added “If you ask me, I say as this world got wrecked by an evil force, and us old breed left to fend for ourselves; I'd prefer to join forces with this folk who've much in common with us. We can either stay put and await an eventual battle against reptilians, or embark on a joint venture to a newer world – I know what I want.”

They seated themselves back at the row of tables. From the crowd came an acoustic mixture of shouts, screams and murmurs. Relt made a mental note that most heads from the crowd nodded, and the five stood to retire for the evening.

Relt addressed the crowd again and said “In a few days we'll be heading back to the forest. Everyone wishing to travel with us, pack rucksacks and saddle the horses. Please accommodate others who do not own a horse. Important is that we take every tool we have.”

Over the next few days the five spent most of the time packing Relt's essential tools, in between answering the many questions people had; as more and more of the settlement packed their own belongings and equipment. Relt mentioned to Jessica and the sentries that he reckoned between eighty and ninety percent of the settlement population will head out with them back to the forest. Another task Relt organised was converting container units into seated trailers for the elderly and children. Within the old breed settlement discrimination was unknown.

The few days passed and the time for departure arrived. Jessica and Relt mounted the horses at the centre of the settlement marketplace and waited as pre-arranged for those old breed who decided to go with them. Most of the old breed had 'survivalist' blood in them and taught from an early age the many skills and levels of preparedness. Five appeared first, but soon ten and later hundreds.

Most of the old breed had carts and trailers built, but others needed to build theirs as quick as possible over the last few days. As the convoy will travel slow, stragglers could tag along at the end. Jessica commented on the accommodation requirements for them on board the mother-ship. One of the sentry guards explained to her that ample accommodation was available, and that what they saw was just a small part of the whole vessel.

With the five leading, the convoy left the old breed settlement

location. One group of men on horseback, volunteered to cover the sides and rear of the convoy; against possible attack from soldiers, wolves, reptilians or other threats for that matter. Embarking on this journey, for the old breed it offered an alternative to being stuck in one location. Although as old breed they had the freedom which the newer breed never knew, and considering the current threat, moral was high.

Everyone knew though that the whole convoy just had one veteran, with experience in combat against the reptilians. As the convoy passed the ruins of the destroyed defence dome, the seriousness of what the five told them days ago now manifested. They could not explain how everything material was demolished and without body as if the insides had eaten away; leaving a shell of what used to be solid. Many found it either strange or of careful design, how the virus worked through materials such as metal and stone; but the ground itself remained undamaged.

At any rate, the sight caused the convoy to increase the pace and curve away from the dome ruin. The rest of the journey went without major incident. As the convoy approached the edge of the forest, a group of forest folk met them. The folks' task was to lead the old breed, with their belongings, through the forest to the village. Stables above ground, had been constructed to house the horses. Once at the village, everyone got shown to vacant accommodation prepared for their arrival, and available facilities.

Ample food was to be available at a central location because apart from the young and old, everyone was to be involved with tasks at different stages. Mulrog and Thorn collected Relt and Jessica, and before attending another meeting with the elders, had time to inspect the basin mould. Thorn now lead the small group and more for Relt explained the mother-ship construction and sealant use.

“During tomorrow morning there will be a mass assembly, of both forest folk and old breed. We will form work groups for required trades and find out what needs to be done. From my side though the main priority will be the building and connecting of the sealant slabs above the trees. I'm just concerned for Leo and True's rescue group, that they'll make it back safe.” explained Thorn.

Relt replied “If you wish I'll be part of the team building the upper dome. The safety of Leo and True is a concern of everyone, but we cannot drop everything now to go after them.”

“Well Relt, I recommend you lead that team – I'll coordinate the

construction, but need the work force led; and I reckon you'd be best at that. You're correct, we're needed at this location. I just hope that.... I mean what if they run into trouble? We'd have no method of knowing.” Thorn said.

“Don't worry, everything will turn out well I'm sure.” Relt said in a comforting tone.

Mulrog appeared to announce that the Elders gathered and could now receive them. They collected Jessica and went to attend the meeting. When they arrived at the table, at which they met before, the elders stood waiting. The sentry guards who returned with Jessica, Relt and the old breed, attended too. The elders proceeded and Mulrog again acted as translator.

“The elders are concerned that the whole migration is in danger of failing, due to the required preparation period – that the reptilian threat grows fast. So humans should be divided to the work forces which need man-power the most. And everyone has to attend meditation training and for this we made a schedule. During this training we will teach you the skills needed for inter-dimensional travel. Once training is complete, we will be ready to enable travel. After we have tuned our frequency to that of the mother-ship, the higher level of collective mass energy generated by us will suffice for the migration.” explained Mulrog.

Jessica, Relt and Thorn looked at each other in disbelief. Unable to comprehend what they needed to do.

Relt, still shaking his head, as if doing so may sort matters for him; asked “Excuse me, but I don't think any of this Sci-Fi idea was explained to us! Could you please be good enough to share a few details? Otherwise I cannot imagine how to start with breaking this news to our people.”

Mulrog translated back for the elders, and after a short discussion among themselves gave a reply to him for translation.

Mulrog shared the reply from the elders “We offer our apologies. Such abilities are not easy to understand. We will make sure that everyone receives intense and complete training. For now though, to explain, through meditation we can regulate our own energy frequency. Our body frequency can be tuned to match that of the trees which form the mother-ship within this forest. This we call oneness. Once in this state, awareness and consciousness will raise to the level of ours. When we are in this state the migration transportation can



begin. Time does not exist on this level. So when we focus our energy and intend the vortex to open, travel through it will follow; which we will depend on as energy vortices are not always stable enough to stay open for long periods. If we do not connect, with no mass energy produced travel will not be physically possible, instead just on an individual astral plane. We hope that this information will suffice for now – it will become clearer during the training.”

Thorn said “Mulrog, no need to apologise. We do appreciate the explanation. As for work force allocation, we assume that when everyone is present at the assembly tomorrow morning, that our people will learn which trade groups need support? From our side we understand the priority task is the building and completion of the dome. If you agree I'll coordinate, and Relt will lead the whole work force. I recommend to have one representative from the carpenter group, who worked on the sealant slab handles, to liaise with Relt so that manpower can be distributed; for further production of dome web frame parts, handles and slabs.”

Now they had talked the plan through and the elders content it was to be followed as hoped, the meeting concluded. They recommended the old breed use the rest of the day to look around the village, visit and talk to members of the forest folk. Heading back to the accommodation, Relt spotted a member of the old breed hunting group, which reminded him that there was unfinished business to which to attend; and excused himself from the company of Jessica and Thorn.

In the village the forest folk began the day just after dawn. For the human old breed they considered no exception, although the majority of those humans spent long days of improvising, building, hunting before now. The next morning the forest folk hosts woke the old breed and guided them along the many lanes which lead to the centre of the village. The hosts prepared breakfast on waist-high shelves for everyone to share. After breakfast the members of the forest folk and old breed gathered in the centre of the village for the assembly. Mulrog got nominated as translator for the elders.

During the assembly they told of the current dilemma and growing threat. With the migration, preparation work and training discussed in more detail. The assembly concluded with collective cheers from the old breed, for the elders. Everyone left the assembly well motivated and afterwards established trade and work groups. Production of

sealant slabs, handles and dome frame began and at an unbelievable speed.

With the forest folk and old breed humans forced to work together, no conflicts occurred, and both races were eager to learn from each other; in particular in the skills of carpentry. With the whole work force being led by Relt, who reported to Thorn; construction of the dome frame begun. Members of the forest folk, who remained at tree-top level; trained on securing the sealant slabs tight together. Once they pulled the slab handles into the wooden frame network, sealant filled the gaps between the slabs and those parts of the dome became air-tight.

One thing Thorn did not have to teach them was the skills required to work at such heights with no safety harness. Because of the forest folks' ability to attach the feet-feelers to tree bark, they could stand and move from branch to branch and always keep their balance. Thorn needed to use a safety harness though and was grateful for the protection which the larger areas of leafed tree tops gave against sun-rays.

This work needed to be carried out during daylight hours and as opposed to rain and wind, a sunny period provided the best conditions for building the sealant slab dome. Another group of both forest folk and humans, stabilised the top level of tree branches. For branch stabilisation they used wooden bars; and afterwards parts of the dome frame network could come into place.

With many of the thin younger trees, wooden bars got placed between them and the surrounding thick older ones; to stabilize and make sure there was little or no tree body-movement once the dome above was in place. Work on and around the trees first begun once the elders finished a telepathic meeting with the most senior trees in the forest. This meeting involved the elders forming a tight circle, with the group of trees in the centre; so each tree was in contact with the chest of at least one elder; and holding hands which completed the connection.

It was an unspoken rule among the forest folk that the tree seniors needed to be consulted for any major events intended to take place within the forest. And this was without doubt the biggest event ever to take place for them. The tree seniors understood as owners of the mother-ship, that pre-migration work needed to be done; so consented and gave every other tree in the forest a cooperation order. This meant

that as soon as the wooden support bars and parts of the dome frame got fitted, that branch growth concentrated on and around those areas as reinforcement.

## Chapter 18

Leo and True wore old breed camouflage hunting suits, but the forest folk sentry guard possessed enough natural camouflage and blended into the surroundings. The group navigated by current position, using the dome network ruins as a compass bearing marker. With little remains of the domes viewable from a distance, they understood that they needed to get beyond the dome before the nightfall.

As a three-bodied group they had the tactical ability to cover front, rear and flanks. Before embarking on this journey, they did not consider taking any form of weapon, because if they found themselves in a position where a weapon might be of use; the odds of them being out-numbered by the enemy were high, blocking any chance of escape. Leo caught sight of a sudden movement of something large, from out of the corner of his left eye.

He dropped himself into a lying position in long grass. By lifting and dropping his arm up, he signalled for the rest of the team to do the same. The others crawled forward to be in line with Leo and pushed themselves up into a press-up position to see what had caught Leo's eye. The sentry pointed to her ear – signalling to the rest of them to listen.

With wind serving as an audio amplifier, they could now view and hear. What they observed was at a distance of a thousand metres, and first appeared to be a giant one hundred metre long and twenty metre wide dark green snake; with sections rippling to generate forward momentum. Upon taking a second and close look, what first looked to be the round scales of a giant snake; was the green steel helmets of soldiers.

But these soldiers did not stem from the human race and by making calculation of size and distance, Leo estimated that they must be larger than the tallest humans. And, although these soldiers marched as one troop, due to the enormous size and muscle; together with thick shields and club weapons of these reptilians; precise synchronised marching could not be achieved. What these troops got in-sync though, was the thunderous grunts and roars which became louder than any other noise. And sounded to be warrior chants in a strange, likely reptilian language.

The sentry pointed east and west. In both directions they discovered

that the marching group of reptilians they observed had not been just one, but was part of a whole army. Leo realised that a tactical move of this size, out in the open meant that the battle for the Earth's crust had begun. And that this reptilian army intended to re-enforce the front line, which had been victorious in defeating human defence forces which made a stand. As it made no sense to risk attracting unnecessary attention to themselves and considering it was an army of beings known as not being human friendly; they remained low until the army had disappeared into the distance.

Considering the army must have consisted of thousands of reptilians, together with the clumsy marching style; it surprised them that the troops had passed within a relatively short time.

With this fresh knowledge of the reptilian invasion movements, Leo explained "We need to increase our pace now. I reckon that our success will depend on what is accomplished today."

The group, while first remaining in a crouched position in case of being spotted by any of the army stragglers, now continued as planned. Now more tactically aware, it slowed the pace at first due to observation periods; but later the group made progress. After passing through a wooded spot, they looked on towards the open fields. Such a pleasant view broke the group's defences for a few moments. Just before they crossed the threshold from woodland to grass field the sentry stopped the rest of the group from moving forward.

It was doubtful that she had stopped the group for trivial matters. Leo, well aware of this asked "What is the problem?"

The forest folk sentry explained "If you look at the grass in front of you as a rule it should be the same colour; because the sun-rays have been shining direct on that part. But in the centre is a large circle of yellow grass, which tells me water is not retained below the surface."

True understood and added "Okay, so you mean less earth is below the yellow grassed part? A sign that a layer of rock or something else large stopped the grass root growth, for example an underground building?"

"That's right. Now if I can just move forward enough until I am stood on grass, I will be able to gain more details." the sentry confirmed.

The others watched as the sentry walked with a careful tread over the threshold onto the grass, stood still and let the feelers along the sides of her feet; anchor in between the grass blades. She closed her

eyes and communicated with the network of grass roots underground. After ten minutes, she opened her eyes again, the feelers retracted, and she returned to the group.

True was so excited and curious, having watched how the forest folk sentry had gathered information, that she burst out “Well? Well? What do you know? What did you discover?”

The sentry, unable to share True's excitement because each of her folk had this communication talent since birth; shared her findings with the rest of the group. They discovered the underground material was concrete, that it formed a building in circle shape with a diameter of a staggering one kilometre. This had to be the education centre with the accommodation and classrooms within the complex. So now they had to find the disposal tube and guessed that they just needed to look for ejected cocoons.

True mentioned “If the children are accustomed to artificial light, I reckon it be best for the actual escape to take place before dawn; otherwise they'll need time to adjust to the brightness of the daylight above ground.”

“Good point True.” Leo confirmed and continued “First we need to find the refuse disposal cocoons though. Do you have any idea at which location our search should start?”

Before answering, True looked around, scanning the ground with her eyes. She said “Well considering that concealment is important for the centre, I imagine they might not want to expose the location by having refuse disposal cocoons out in the open. So the cocoons must exit the tube somewhere... look! Beyond the grassed land in front of us. That wooded part is more dense than it should be for such a small group of trees, so is the place to start our search.”

After agreeing, but before they moved across the grassed land, Leo suggested that they take a longer route which took them along the left edge. Although the sentry was able to walk out on the grass and return unnoticed, the risk that moving as a group might trigger an alarm remained. The group led by Leo, followed the edge of the grassed land to the left, ensuring they stayed on the other side of the threshold; which was a mixture of dark forest foliage, fallen and rotten wood and nettles.

The humans in the group noticed that the nettles did not sting the sentry, who's legs had no protection. Upon reaching the other side, they found themselves in the wooded part which True had seen and

suggested to start the search for the refuse disposal cocoons. Now the sentry led the group, and they spread out in one line to move forward combing the ground as they went. Just as they were considering calling the search off and trying elsewhere, Leo nearly fell over a steep slope which was not viewable from a distance.

The slope was one of the sides of a small valley, which split the woods. Leo's nostrils filled with the stench first, which rose from the bottom of the valley. He noticed the cause of this pungent fowl smell was a pit of refuse disposal cocoons. Each cocoon being consumed at a slow rate by a bath of yellow acid. They found what they sought – entry to the education centre.

Without an exchange of words, the group now sat on the ground; a bed of dried leaves cushioning the abrupt drop into a sitting position. The constant energy supply required to stay alert while on the move, was more than thought and now the human bodies needed replenishment. The sentry could tap into the energy source nature offered, so did not need a rest period – but still seated along with the others. Leo ran through the rescue plan with the group as they rested.

“Let's go through our plan again so that each of us remembers our roles.” he said.

After the others nodded in agreement, Leo first addressed the sentry “I'm sorry, but I hoped that during the journey you'd tell us by what name you go. Communication with each other will be important, so what are you called?”

The sentry felt awkward at first by the question, but understood that it must be unique to humans.

Smiling, she said “Mine is too difficult for you to pronounce. So you can call me 'Demla'. That is near enough to my real name.”

“Okay Demla, thanks. To recap, you'll act as scout, and once we've located the children you'll be responsible for keeping them calm to enable as quick a getaway as possible. As we got surprise on our side, I hope we'll not be up against a small army. So once we're sure that we're not in danger after taking out any security personnel; it'll be best if you headed back to the refuse disposal tube and guard it for our return with the children. I'll be responsible for breaking any locks, combat measures and protecting the children.”

After the briefing, for a while Leo monitored the intervals between cocoon ejections from the refuse disposal tube. He noted that on average, one cocoon left the tube every sixty minutes. This schedule

no doubt allowed for the acid at the bottom of the pit to start destruction of both cocoon and refuse content before the next one landed.

They decided that Demla enters the tube first, to get to the end and press the emergency button; which will stop the machine and open the cocoon loading door. She could take care of the machine operator and secure the refuse zone. It made little sense for everyone to enter the tube together as there was a risk that for whatever reason the cocoon rejection schedule might change. On her own Demla stood a chance of getting back out if required. The group was now ready to move. True had wedged the tube's steel exit door open by using a long branch she found and pushed deep into the ground; to stop the door closing on them.

They watched a refuse disposal cocoon travel along the tube and end the journey with a not-so-dramatic fall over the slope; splash-landing in the acid pool. As soon as the cocoon left the tube, Demla dashed into the entrance without a word; and was deep inside the tube tunnel before the rest of the group could look. Although the inside of the tube was smooth due to regular usage, Demla's foot feelers gave suction as required and enabled her to propel forward at fast speed; even though moving in a crouched position.

At this pace she was well on track to reach the end of the tube within sixty minutes. Demla, unlike humans, did not need light to move without obstruction; her senses served her well for orientation and in this tight space her hearing kept her bearings central by sound ranging from her body to the inner tube walls. With her foot-feelers ensuring soft and quiet foot-steps as she continued her journey through the refuse disposal tube; Demla was able to reach the end without attracting unwanted attention from anyone who may have been operating the tube loading machine.

At the end of the tube a large round metal disk, worn smooth from years of launching of refuse cocoons; and gave a calculated shove to give each of the balls of rubbish enough momentum to exit. Demla now searched for the emergency button, to spring open the cocoon loading door. She had not looked far before she found the button at the side of the door. The button, built into the tube wall; could be accessed with ease.

Demla used her long-range hearing to listen for movement outside the tube, to be prepared for possible close-quarter combat; for which



she could use her skills acquired during sentry guard training. She pressed the button as slow as possible, to stop the door from opening wide. Demla heard the click and as the door protruded outwards she followed it at the same speed, landed on the loading tray; and sprang mid-air into a roll to land feet first on the concrete floor. The room was well lit which under these circumstances was more of a hazard, leaving little shadow for cover.

As the room door was ajar it did offer a shadowed spot behind it, into which Demla moved. Looking back into the room, she found the cause of the overwhelming stench – trolleys with sacks of mixed refuse. Years of refuse storage had allowed a fowl aroma to sink into the room ceiling, floor and walls. Her feelers suddenly felt the distant vibration caused by rough-edged wheels rolling over concrete. And assuming that someone now pushed the next trolley of refuse sacks along the corridor towards the room, Demla pushed herself back into the corner behind the door and waited.

The door swung back as the corner of the trolley smashed into it. The speed of the opening door buffered by a metal arm connecting the top of the door to the wall. An over-weight uniformed man pushed the trolley through the room entrance. Due to the mundaneness of this man's duties, he had no cause to be on the alert for intruders. Whistling an unknown tune, he continued to unload the sacks of refuse; to be later squeezed into the cocoons.

Demla approached the man from the rear, ensuring that the room's lighting kept her shadow behind her. As the man's extra weight was lower torso, it could be seen that he never had a muscular figure; and so she was able to access his shoulder pressure point. Her green fingers clamped tight, on the point until unconsciousness arrived within him. She then bound and gagged him before being placed in wooden cupboard used for storing brooms and mops.

When no cocoon ejected from the tube as per the current hourly schedule, Leo took that as being the signal for True and himself to enter the tube. With True leading and Leo following behind, the end of the tunnel soon came into sight as light shined in from the room. Demla lent them a helping hand to climb to the ground from the tube. The rescuers now embarked on the quest to locate the children. In the corridor no noise could be heard apart from the slight buzzing sound which the turbines circulating the re-cycled air in the over-head air-conditioning pipes produced. As they approached classroom doors,

Demla looked at a slant through the glass door pane to avoid being seen.

As they walked along the corridor, Leo drew small crosses on the blue walls at ankle height with a piece of white chalk he obtained before leaving; for them to be able to follow when they retreated. Lessons ended earlier and possibly the children had finished their evening meals by now. So they searched for the accommodation dormitories. The corridor now came to an end at large double doors.

The rescuers now crouched, with Demla and Leo at the doors. From what they heard, the children chatted and giggled, defying the tutor who shouted commands for them to be silent and sleep. They had found the accommodation. They continued to listen until Leo was content that just one tutor remained in the room. Now they needed to wait until that tutor made an exit.

After ten minutes the tutor switched the room lights off and bid the children 'Good Night'. It took another ten minutes though for him to leave the room – he had stayed behind to listen out for possible offenders who disobeyed the rules on purpose. As the tutor left, the room the doors swung shut behind him. The tutor still held his cup of tea as Leo cupped one hand over the man's mouth and nostrils – blocking the supply of oxygen. Demla sprang forward and took the tea cup before it fell. True helped Leo to drag the now limp body of the tutor into the nearest classroom. They waited until snoring began and no talk came from the dormitory before entering. Demla entered the room first alone.

Once inside, with eye-sight as good in the dark as in daylight, she saw the rows of beds. An uncountable group, but she reckoned that between fifty and one hundred children lived in this building. As Leo and True entered the room, like Demla they could not believe how many children housed together at this location. Demla switched a few room lights on for the others. They located her in one of the rows and headed over at the cue of a wave of her hand. The pair's bodies vibrated once inside, and the cause was Demla herself, who was now in a trance state; but conscious and aware of her surroundings. As they arrived at her side, Demla let out humming sounds between breaths.

At each bed she held the hand of the child, and as it fell into a trance she helped it out of bed. Afterwards she led the child to the next bed and repeated the procedure for the next one. Demla indicated to Leo and True to take the children, who now stood hand-in-hand, out of the

room and to head back to the refuse disposal tube. Once the children had joined the chain escaping from the centre, Demla passed the group at an amazing speed, and returned to the tube to secure the refuse disposal zone.

The centre staff must have deemed the complex secure enough as no security guards patrolled the corridors during day or night. The children were still in a trance state and protected by True at the front and Leo at the rear; watching out for any staff who discovered the dormitory to be empty; now arrived at the tube. Demla entered the tube and headed the group out of the education centre. As the last child entered the tube, Leo followed and closed the loading bay door just enough to avoid triggering the cocoon eject mechanism.

As Demla left the refuse disposal tube, she made a short reconnaissance patrol of the immediate surrounding ground. Although the air outside was a welcome change to that within the tube, her sense of smell filtered a heavy, damp and pungent stench; which did not belong to this dry wooded location. Even the dump of refuse disposal cocoons did not account for this vile odour.

She stood still, listened for sounds and sank her feet-feelers through layers of dirt into the earth; and was content it was safe for the rest of the now larger group to exit the tube. Having returned, Demla signalled again with a wave of her hand to True that they should now leave the tube. As the group appeared from the tube, Demla remained in front of the exit on the slope; to guide the children up on to the flat ground. True found a piece of flat ground not dense with trees, on which they could gather.

Once the whole group arrived, Demla, Leo and True decided they could make better progress if the children remained in the current trance state. Demla, using both hands, connected to both ends of the chain of children and intensified the frequency of the vibrations.

A series of three metre long wooden stakes shot up through the surrounding ground, and between each one was rope net. They now realised the clearing in the woods was not natural, but instead cleared as part of this giant trap which had now encircled them.

Leo ran around the inside circumference of the trap looking for an escape route. But he was unsuccessful because the reptilians constructed it to contain humans! True, trying to control her emotions, looked now to view the captors, who until now had not been interested in showing themselves. Then, at first she felt a slight movement below

her feet as if an earthquake was starting. Within five minutes though, away from the trap the ground sank; forming a circle of ten metres in width. Within this circle the earth exploded outwards, showing the exit of a dark tunnel.

She recognised the vehicle that drove out of the tunnel though and shouted to the others “Reptilians!”

Demla and Leo ran over to True, in hope of an explanation and reassurance that they were safe. Now unable to contain herself, True dropped to her knees as she released a burst of tears. The others held her.

“I’m so sorry things ended in this dilemma. We cannot escape now.” True said, pointing to the bulky vehicle from which muscle-bound reptilians now jumped.

“Hope always remains.” Leo said in a strong voice.

Shaking her head, True explained “No! No! You must understand, that vehicle is the same as the one in the dome; and those reptilians are not soldiers, they’re the butchers ready to collect our body parts. The other ones now coming out of the tunnel, they’re soldiers and will make the first killings. Time will soon be up for us I’m afraid.”

Meanwhile between thirty and forty reptilian soldiers left the tunnel and now surrounded the perimeter of the human trap. During her last confrontation with them True noted that they wielded large clubs, this time they used roughly-made axes and jagged-edged carving knives; issued for the task of butchering. Leo, although a fully trained soldier with combat experience, had not come to terms with the visual contact with these walking lizard beasts. And considering the miserable dilemma, he should now have other things on his mind but instead he stared at the reptilian soldiers; studying them with a strange interest a fellow soldier had.

“Whatever happens, we should try as best we can to make sure the children stay in a trance state until the end. At least they’ll be spared the sight and pain of the onslaught to come.” True said to Demla.

Demla now confided “True, I am to blame for us now being trapped. Because when I scouted here earlier, I smelt a strange foul odour which did not belong in these parts and could not match it to any of the surroundings. I cannot understand my failure to trust my senses.”

Although among the reptilian soldiers there was much hissing and bickering, even punching each other; they did not try to attack the captured humans. Leo shared this finding aloud after he finished his

long-range inspection of one of the reptilian soldiers; and mixed attire of canvas rags and rough-made bits of body armour.

“I don't understand! Look, they just stand around doing nothing, as if on a training exercise?” asked Leo.

But True did know why, and relating back to the reptilian attack in the dome, explained “They're just soldiers and have no own thoughts or ideas. Think of ants or wasps; the hive command network of those little armies – what is different is that the reptilian soldiers are three metres in height! No, they carried out given orders and now await the

Commander, and if I'm not wrong it will be a creepy species in a cloak. That monster feeds on fear and terror endured by those to be slaughtered.”

Leo considered what action he could take, to make use of this lull; before the reptilian Commander arrived and gave the order for the butchering to begin. While looking around, something flying through the air caught his eye – the object flew fast and did not have the form of any bird; it looked more to be a hand-sized winged bag. A burst of these projectiles followed the first, on an elevated path through the air and descended on the targets – the reptilians.

The prisoners knew through this commotion though that a rescue was underway. But Leo, although now allowing his military-trained adrenalin take control, was thinking how they could help the rescuers. By now the first barrage of the objects thrown had landed on the targets. Upon contact, the little bags, each made of three tree leaves, burst at the seams; allowing the sealant to ooze out from between the leaf edges. The bags landing on the muscle-bound reptilian soldiers provided little distraction, but just enough needed for the odd bag to the make an exact hit. The intended targets being the scaled reptilian faces, in particular the nostrils.

Observing how the rescuers' weaponry was intended to work, Leo shouted in a commanding tone “Kick dirt, kick, kick as much at them as possible. Quick! Kick, kick as I'm doing.” and as he spoke he kicked up dust from the dry ground, at the surrounding reptilians.

Demla reacted at once to Leo's command, although did not hesitate to consider the reason for the required action. Sinking her feet-feelers into the ground, and at speed hard to follow with the human eye, she turned until in a spinning state. At which point, while remaining in that state, she moved around the inside of the guarded enclosure. She made sure she remained in contact with part of the group of children at

intervals. Although poor sighted due to the dust cloud too, she saw a few of the reptilian faces, on which the projectiles made an exact landing.

As Leo had intended, the dust served a multi-purpose, blocking sight and providing the best conditions for the sealant to dry. The reptilians let out a mixture of noises which, depending on the individual air supply; varied from deep roars to high-pitched yelping before using up the last oxygen intake. With the reptilian guard pre-occupied with fighting to stay alive, the rescuers advanced into the open; and hauled any guards still standing to the ground by use of rope and slip noose. With the enemy overwhelmed, and the dust now settled, the identity of the rescuers could be seen. Leo was the first to recognise the camouflage suits of the old breed hunters. As the hunters pulled at the reptilian enclosure, a voice was most familiar to them.

“Yep, these reptilians are definitely the ugliest species to have walked this planet! Gussed you might welcome a ration of help young Leo, and besides we had no more rabbits to hunt.” Relt said.

Leo gave Relt a strong hug. And as he looked at the heaps of scaled green reptilian bodies on the ground, commented “I must say that help came just at the right time.”

Releasing Relt from his hold, Leo ran over to the nearest reptilian soldier and crouched next to it.

Puzzled, Relt inquired “Leo what's wrong?”

As Leo touched the thick stone-hard spiked scales over the shoulder blades of the reptilian's back, he said “I just had to take a closer look at these creatures. Never in my wildest nightmares could such beasts have appeared.”

He found that with many scales, in particular those around the shoulder tops of the reptilian, he could prise a finger underneath them and they retracted afterwards; due to the grisly thick skin attached to the inside of the scales. Rubbing his left hand over the now lifeless taloned hand, which still held an over-dimensional meat cleaver tight; Leo saw that a thin film of mossy slim had stuck to the palm of his hand.

With an automatic urge, he raised his palm to his nostrils to smell this strange goo. Within a second his nasal sense registered a fowl decayed odour and his brain, unable to match the unrecognisable stench, instantly triggered a vomit session. Recovering with an intake a fresh air, Leo wiped his hand over the reptilian's ragged shirt below the

body armour and returned To Relt and the others.

With a grin Relt said “I could have told you that any creature living underground, in damp, filthy conditions, might not smell of roses!”

He pulled a stern face and now assuming command of those present, Relt turned to the group and urged “Let's get out before the reptilian backup forces arrive.”

The hunter group split, with one part leading the convoy and the other covering the rear. Demla and True remained at the front and rear of the single file of children. The children walked hand-in-hand and stayed in the trance through the vibration frequency controlled by Demla. Leo and Relt joined the team of hunters covering the rear of the convoy. As they proceeded forward, in rotation they looked back and to the flanks and continued this procedure even during short conversations.

Looking back at the reptilians, Leo commented “What a pity we couldn't make use of any of the reptilian weaponry.”

After sixty minutes, during which time the convoy followed the fur markers the hunters tied to trees during the outgoing journey; they came to a forced stop due to a high blockade of thick thorn bramble. One of the lead team of hunters gave a series of short calls by blowing through his cupped hands. Within seconds the brambles started to shake and rise from the ground as members of the forest folk who had been lying below the blockade; moved up onto hands and knees and transported the brambles to one side. With the bramble blockade now moved, the convoy continued.

After the rear hunter team passed through, they placed the blockade back in the original position. A small team of forest folk went back and at the point the convoy had stopped at, laid false tracks off to the left for three kilometres; in the event that the reptilians sent a tracking troop to look for them.

The convoy reached the lines of hundreds of forest folk and old breed, spread throughout the woods. They had with them custom-built rucksack frames, each designed to carry a child. For each frame a pair of old breed men teamed up, so they could take turns in carrying a child. Demla, together with the other forest folk, followed on behind those old breed carrying the frames, to make sure a continual supply of energy flowed through vibrations; needed for the trance state of the children.

During the journey back, the old breed hunters laid a series of traps,

varying in design; to make sure that any reptilian force which found the true tracks were at least injured or even killed as they passed through the unseen obstacles. Waiting at the forest edge to escort the returning convoy was a line of the old breed, to avoid having the children awaken to the faces of the forest folk. This allowed the children first to get accustomed to the different surroundings.

Later they had to attend a gathering, to be briefed and the forest folk and elders were to appear at the end to greet the children. At the gathering, Jessica and Thorn shed tears of relief knowing Leo and True had made it back to the safety of the forest. Now that the forest dome was complete and in place, Leo approached the elders together with Mulrog as his translator; and explained that the threat of a reptilian attack on the forest was high and that they should take necessary defensive measures. He proposed that a guard force be established and if possible that the sealant dome be camouflaged from the outside with leaved branches. The elders respected Leo's combat experience and consented to his proposed security measures.



## Chapter 19

Meditation training had begun while Leo's and True's team were rescuing the children from the education centre. Now they had returned, they and the children received extra lessons so they could catch up with the others; who started the training earlier. Demla and Mulrog volunteered themselves as tutors, to the delight of Leo and True. The training schedule started after breakfast the next day. A secluded but open spot in the forest served as the classroom.

Demla opened the first training session with an introduction. Once her class formed a semi-circle with multiple rows, she announced “Welcome to the first meditation training lesson. We will first look at individual meditation and finding one's energy vibration and later move on to collective meditation as a group. It is that final phase that will make every one of you a pilot of our forest mother-ship. Training will be hard, intensive and tiring at first.”

Demla explained to the pupils, after showing how to sit in the correct position with crossed legs and the art of controlled breathing; that once eyes were closed to concentrate on creating an imaginary location. The location Leo created in his mind, was a beach with golden coloured sand; with light blue waves moving in gentle motions and coconut palms swaying. He always remembered a similar picture, on the inside of an accommodation dome as an advertisement for the holiday domes; and so found it an easy-to-use location template.

After the pupils confirmed that locations were ready, Demla explained “Everyone is a master of their own reality. With your minds' creation ability you can change the picture of reality. As a practice, close both eyes and return to the locations you created. Once at the locations, create a door which has 'DEMLA' written on it.”

The pupils had added the doors to the locations. To test, Demla asked Leo to close his eyes and return to his location and concentrate on the door. With that Demla closed her eyes too and went to her training location. She created a door which had 'LEO' written on the front and opened it. Leo watched in awe as Demla stepped through the doorway and onto the beach. At his location she spoke to him, but he found that he could neither hear what she said nor speak himself.

Demla seated herself on the beach, and in the sand wrote with a finger 'WAKE UP NOW'. Leo opened his eyes and reported to the rest of the class what had happened.

“Demla, why couldn't I make out what you said or speak myself at my location?” Leo asked.

Demla said “Leo, we will cover that in the next stage of training. You first have to make yourself present at the location. To explain, I gathered that it was the location you created because at mine I had an image of a door with 'LEO' written on it. But once in the location, although I did not see you, I still spoke as if I could; for the sake of this exercise.”

For the rest of the afternoon they spent creating a personal presence in the locations and visiting other peoples' locations. The next day's training began with Demla teaching her pupils how to find the body vibration frequency by identifying one's current emotion. And for this exercise the best conditions were if everyone either had a neutral or positive feeling.

By doing this, most were able to rise to a higher frequency; considering the current trauma and worry. This meant that part of the training session involved releasing every negative thought. Confirmation of successful training, delighted the pupils and what they discussed showed awareness continued to grow. True enjoyed the exercise in which she liaised with Leo at the location his mind created. She had never imagined such a feat was possible without advanced technology.

She found that after she had visited a few times and made herself present, she could smell the fresh ocean air and speak with Leo while on the beach. The experience was as if she watched and acted in the same film. Over the next few days the group had explored the art of vibration calibration, whereby a few or more people, holding hands; reached the same one frequency. This task involved each individual identifying the vibration of the people either side of them and tuning one's body vibration to match; either by lowering or raising the vibration to be in-sync with those holding hands. The aim of the exercise was to achieve one frequency, which they achieved through concentration.

Another exercise involved communication via vibrations, a complicated, intensive and tiring skill to learn. A tree was used as the message recipient for this exercise. The message to be sent was 'If you receive this message, please acknowledge'. Once in-sync with the receiver's vibration, the sender spoke the message with an inner voice instead of aloud. Before the sender could connect to the recipient and

align frequencies, Demla recommend physical contact for optimal results; so the sender placed hand palms on the tree bark.

Under Demla's coaching, in pairs they took part in the exercise. Leo and True got allocated to a large senior forest canopy tree. True was the first to try. She approached the tree and placed her hand palms against the bark.

“That is good, True. Notice how the vibration now circulates your body. Once the vibrations reach your forearms, use both hands to seek the tree's vibration. Now allow the vibration to connect with yours. It will then give you the impression that multiple frequencies flow throughout the body. But as you allow the incoming frequency to enter, the body will align one's own frequency to it. The alignment will make you think you have received a fresh life. Take in and enjoy the experience provided by this connection.” Demla explained.

True received the tree's vibrations through her hands and understood that her vibration now calibrated. As this happened, the vibrations gave the false impression that her body elevated; while her feet remained on the ground. With the tree's vibration came refreshing life energy. The love, neutrality and purity this tree shared, released emotions as her personal awareness matured. Although tears ran over her face, she smiled. Now came the part which required True to send her message to the tree.

Speaking the message in her mind she said *'If you receive this message, please acknowledge.'* and felt the message being sent through her hands. And at that moment it happened. She heard a series of words being spoken with one minute intervals between each. The voice was neither that of male or female. She then spoke the words aloud for the others: “Greetings.” “Message.” “Received.” “You.” “Human.” “They.” “Eldest.” “Earth.”

True opened her eyes and dropped her arms. Leo leapt over to his sister in excitement, asking “How was it 'Sis? What happened? Tell us!”

Looking at Demla as she spoke, True described her first vibrational conversation. Afterwards she asked “Demla, the words received back from the tree didn't make complete sense. Do trees communicate with odd words or did I just misunderstand? And, what did 'They' and 'Eldest' mean?”

Demla smiled and explained “True, please be patient. Trees can hold long conversations. With practice, you will be able to fine-tune and

capture more of the conversation content. Trees never talk in the 'I' nor the 'We' form. They always refer to themselves as 'They'. You must understand they do not know individualism, instead are at one with Mother Earth; which is why they class themselves as the 'Eldest'."

Once the group of pupils had reached the level of the rest of the old breed in the forest, the next level of training begun. But this next level was not just the final phase, it was one that none of the forest folk had attempted before. The whole success of the planned migration depended on the ability of the forest folk, humans and trees on the mother-ship to connect and vibrate as one; to launch and navigate the vessel through the vortex to planet Mars. But even if everyone vibrated as one, the migration was a test and pilot project in one; and so they risked everything including the lives of everyone on board.

Before the final exercise began, a team of forest folk acted as guard force; because they already possessed advanced skills in the art of body vibrations. They could afford to miss the training, but not the humans. Once the guard had taken up positions covering the forest dome perimeter, the remaining forest folk and humans took to the pre-arranged places within the forest mother-ship; and ensured that each hand palm touched a tree. The other trees in the exercise connected through the root network. The elders orchestrated the exercise, with Mulrog translating.

The connection started. As it was impossible to know once the connection completed, Mulrog needed to give a one-word message; both in English and in his own language: "Launch" "Azuj-tok"

Once he connected, Mulrog was to send the messages in a continual tact to the tree next to him; until he received the same messages back from the tree on his opposite side. As soon this had happened he was to release a short whistle tone. This gave the signal to the elders for them to emit a rise in frequency. Those connected for this exercise concentrated on the elevation of the mother-ship. After sixty minutes of continual concentration and higher frequency flow, a vibration could be felt from underground. This time the vibration was external and created as the sealant basin below left the dock and rose as part of the mother-ship towards the surface.

The guard force watched with astonishment, after first hearing a low humming to the rear, the mother-ship being raised to one metre above them. Dust spread everywhere and earth and foliage fell back to the ground. The loud ripping of various sorts of roots could be heard afar

as the massive construction left the dock from the surrounding forest outskirts. The mother-ship had completed the first launch.

The elders, hearing calls from the forest folk guard team, had been content the exercise was a full success; and whistled back to Mulrog who sent an instruction to descend. Upon receiving the instruction through vibration, concentration was on the descent and the mother-ship lowered back into the original dock position. Instant cheering could be heard throughout the forest.

Concerned, Leo approached Mulrog and explained “Mulrog, although we covered our tracks as we returned from rescuing the children; I reckon this exercise just may have given away our location. If not to any reptilians nearby who pursued us, at least underground as I'm sure the launch caused vibrations kilometres afar. The guard should build outposts, so we can be alerted to a reptilian approach from any direction. As for defence, I'm not sure we could stop an organised attack. Any ideas?”

“I agree Leo. Well I know that until now you managed to defeat the reptilians by blocking the airways with the sealant. So although we no longer have enough left to make further weapons, we could use tree sap?” Mulrog asked.

Leo patted Mulrog on his green leafed shoulder and said “That's it, great. Let's check with Thorn and the construction team to find out if they could turn their efforts to producing weapons. We'll need the trees' help to donate as much sap as possible.”

A meeting took place with Mulrog, Leo, Jessica, Relt, True and Thorn in attendance. To begin with, they confirmed that weapon production was to take the form of projectiles; as used against the reptilians during the rescue but this time using tree sap instead of sealant. Mulrog offered to liaise with the elders and consult the trees for permission for sap to be drained.

Thorn was to oversee the production together with the rest of the forest dome construction team. And Jessica and True to give reptilian recognition training for the guard force, in particular for those manning the outpost towers. This training included practice throwing at mobile facial targets, to make sure that most of the projectiles thrown hit the moving reptilians around the nasal part of their scaled faces.

Relt asked Mulrog “So what other training needs to take place before the migration can take place?”

“The final training session is just for elders. They will practice how to open the vortex, through which we will travel. This training will be without an audience. Commanding a vortex entrance can be dangerous if not controlled in the correct manner.” Explained Mulrog.

Mulrog's answer prompted questions from Jessica “So how will the mother-ship travel through the vortex and how long will the journey take?”

“Well, the vortex is a tunnel. Vortexes are not always the same. Lengths and duration of existence is always different. Once in the vortex the law of time dimension no longer exists. Travel through the vortex can be accomplished within a short time, even hours or minutes of Earth time. But as I said before, we will risk everything as the whole migration journey is open to so many dangers.” Mulrog continued.

Silence followed as everyone in attendance remained seated, reflecting for themselves just how dangerous a journey lay ahead; and not knowing if they could make it to the destination alive. And if they survived what was in store for them upon arrival? Was it possible to live as planned on a different planet?

## Chapter 20

During the next seven days vigilant guard shifts, reptilian recognition training, target practice; and vortex command and control training for the elders, was on the action plan. Jessica and True made clay reptilian heads for the recognition training. Moulding the busts from memory, they produced many mock reptilian soldier heads; and one of the black caped leader they had seen back when they escaped from the dome together with Thorn.

After recognition training the clay busts served for target practice. Grenades made of wide leaves containing sap, could be launched at the targets from various distances. So elevation and wind needed to be considered for the perfect shot. A hit counted when a grenade caught a reptilian face just above the nostrils, allowing the sap to run and block the air intake. Although these weapons might not cause terminal damage to the enemy, they may slow and even stop an attack – depending on how determined and fit an invading force was.

Thorn and his crew got well into the grenade production. Leo and Relt took the old breed hunters, along with a group of the forest folk hunters who joined them; along the mother-ship forest perimeter. At and between the outpost towers they laid a series of traps, staked thick bramble to the ground and dug plenty of trenches and pot-holes. The elders completed the secluded training, but had not been content with the results though.

During the training the elders opened and controlled small vortexes. But the first ones closed themselves before the elders could make the controlled closure. Later they mastered this task, but it still remained a deep concern of theirs. The speed at which the humans learned the use the energy vibrations pleased the elders though.

The elders summoned Mulrog to call the humans and forest folk together as an announcement was to be made. Everyone was to attend apart from the current guard shift. Once they gathered, the elders announced that although training was now complete before the migration began one thing was still to be addressed. The audience became confused, and they looked at each other as if the answer might be read from someone else's face.

The elders put an end to the suspense, by announcing that a name should be used for the civilisation once on Mars; which they became after they left this planet. From now on everyone on board the mother-

ship, both human or forest folk, are to be known as the 'Tiarrians'. Tiarrians, survivors from planet Earth and founders of a civilisation on a different planet. Upon hearing the news, everyone gave a great loud cheer. Next, without hesitation a spread of food and drink came from every direction.

Although the biggest challenge was still to be confronted, they still achieved what they believed to be impossible – a well earned rest and cause for celebration. Final preparation work went on during the next day. The tiarrians produced provisions for human and forest folk diets, and those of the livestock. Adequate rations went into storage, including vegetables and other plant seeds which they sowed for short term supply.

Demla and a group of forest folk volunteered to place animals into a sleep state, in the stables and sties, just before the start of migration launch. Many tiarrians expressed how they wanted to form teams for post-migration work, and the elders had consented; once Mulrog had explained in the forest folk language. There was no team size limit and citizens may join or leave various teams as they wished.

Teams needed to be formed for most common and other trades. Each team may later host training programmes for the tiarrians willing to learn those occupations. But as soon as the migration had completed, the highest priority was for the forest and vegetation to grow. This was vital for survival as the conditions on Mars needed to become less hostile and more habitable for the tiarrians. At least the mother-ship was of adequate size, to accommodate the tiarrians on board after the landing and for as long as necessary.



## Chapter 21

As a reward for his efforts in enabling the successful rise of the reptilians, Larsst received a promotion to Commander of the complete reptilian Terrain Force; as promised by his senior. Reports from the troops out on the ground confirmed that just a small human resistance remained intact. The virus served the intended purpose well. Larsst ordered a unique custom uniform to be tailored to his specifications.

Many humans survived – in exchange though they had to pledge allegiance to the superior reptilian race and served as slaves. So Larsst now had his own slave tailor, who's first task was to make Larsst's uniform. The uniform reminded the slave more of a party gown, but he did not dare speak. Part of the uniform was a silver plate which covered the shoulders and shaped to a strange form to make sure it fit on Larsst's horned shoulders. From beneath the silver plate ran a series of long and wide golden ribbons on the back – designed to account for the rough reptilian spiked spine and tail.

And at the front a silver breast plate with red and gold wreaths engraved into it. A nod of the head from Larsst was enough for the slave to retreat into his wooden pen in one corner of the room. With the slave out of sight, Larsst stroked the uniform breast plate, held his head high without looking at any particular object; and produced a series of rough purrs from the bottom of his throat during this moment of grandeur.

The virus had not reached and damaged many isolated human World Administration barracks, so Larsst could move into the quarters of his choice. The parade ground in front of his headquarters now filled row upon row of reptilian soldiers, eager to march off to war against any remaining human resistance. A knock at the three metre high double oak doors, disrupted this state of personal lust for Larsst.

Turning on his scaled taloned heels he shouted “Enter, be quick!”

The doors burst open and a pair of clumsy reptilian Masters entered the room while tripping over their own thick heavy feet.

With hate in his voice, Larsst questioned “Who are you? What do you have to report?”

The Masters looked at each other. With an elbow one of the Masters shoved the other to prompt it to speak. With a gulp he said “The humans! At the human children education dome. They received help from outside.”

Saliva seeped out and dangled from the sides of Larsst's shiny scaled mouth as he asked "Who had help? Who helped? And what did you do?"

The last question from Larsst caused the reptilian Master, who spoke before, to take a step backwards; prompting his colleague to answer instead.

The other Master explained "They came from nowhere, humans and others – moving trees!" He took a quick breath and continued "We had the children in a trap and waited for further orders. But an attack came from behind us."

Larsst walked towards the Masters, in a vertical stance ensuring that his unique uniform was most optical; as his movements forced the golden ribbons to wave in the air.

After he was one metre in front of the Masters, Larsst stood still and asked "Interesting. Tell me, how did it happen that the pair of you survived? Did the other troops fight until the end?"

The same reptilian Master said "Yes, they fought brave and proud. They threw many bombs at us. We could not breathe at first, but the liquid in the bombs did not block our nostrils. We returned by the fastest possible route to call for reinforcements."

Silence followed as Larsst walked behind his desk, which broke as he smashed of his taloned fists on the desk top.

He shouted "Reporting is one thing, and bravery is another! And bravery is something neither of you have! Disgraceful! You have facial scars from battles long forgotten – once heroes, but what are you now? You are both reduced to the rank of Soldier. Now send me another Master so that I can coordinate the next plan of action."

After the pair of demoted reptilian soldiers left the room, Larsst took the chance to ponder things over for himself. *'How did the humans sabotage a reptilian deployment executed upon my intuition and plan in the first place?'* he thought. He had been confident that if a human resistance group existed somewhere; a rescue of the children at the education centre was imminent. Humans could be so predictable.

He intended to send the eager troops outside to hunt the humans. But he had a sinister hunch that an agenda was in the pipeline, which was behind the rescue of the children. He needed to find out what the human resistance agenda was even if he had to step out of his official reptilian realm role to do so.

## Chapter 22

Trees within the mother-ship detected underground earth vibrations. Due to the sealant basin of the mother-ship, the messages the trees received from the vibrations, were accessible after the delay in transmission. Demla and a few other forest folk picked up the alarm signal being sent from the trees.

The trees told them that a few thousand of heavy-moving troops and vehicles headed towards the mother-ship. They reckoned that this moving block of muscle, iron and stone, was just a few days march away. Residents of the mother-ship needed to be informed now, and besides the perimeter tower guard, a small reconnaissance team was to be deployed, to warn of the oncoming attack.

Without further consideration, the elders gave the official consent for the migration to begin. The guard were to stay on duty until the majority of the others connected and one frequency was circulating by energy vibration. A selected member of the guard was to stay on the mother-ship, to be responsible for the recall of the rest of the guard. As confirmed by the elders, it was unnecessary for the guard to connect because the existing connection should be strong enough to open the vortex, and migrate the mother-ship.

Jessica, Leo, Relt, Thorn, True and Mulrog attended a final migration meeting with the elders, as the last of the reconnaissance patrols arrived back. Relt asked for the patrol leader to join the meeting. And as the man entered, at the invite of the elders, he ate and drank from the provisions on the large table. Relt looked at the patrol leader, who was an old breed hunter, and with a flat handed gesture prompted him to speak.

The patrol leader started his report “At dawn this morning the chaotic noise generated by a colossal battle movement, hit our ears kilometres ahead of the actual event. We skirmished to higher ground for a clearer view, once the early morning haze cleared. But we didn't get the view we wanted due to the permanent shield of dust this movement created around it. We determined though that it was a heavy move. Not just reptilian troops, but vehicles made of stone. These troops advanced in rows, with at least fifty armed soldiers in each. The reptilian force is now one day's march away. If the aim of this whole move is to attack us, I reckon that we have made them angry.” and Mulrog translating for the elders.

It was obvious from the report that the delayed vibrations detected by the trees gave unreliable information.

Relt thanked the patrol leader and asked him to stay at the meeting as an advisor. Thorn looked at Jessica and True, and added "If what we saw during our dome network escape, is the same as those stone vehicles; I'm sure you'd agree the reason for the movement is to attack humans. Because those vehicles are used to transport flesh after rough butchering at the attack location."

Jessica and True nodded in agreement. Leo explained that trenches had been dug at five hundred metres on the other side of the mother-ship perimeter. And that each was large enough to make sure it was not possible for the reptilians to leap or drive over them.

Relt added that together with Mulrog and Thorn, messages were to be sent to other old breed settlements via pigeon, and forest folk via tree root network. To explain the plans and stages of the migration, and although not confirmed a success yet, others are welcome to follow afterwards.

The elders rose from the seats and told Mulrog to translate that the meeting has finished, and everyone should take up the pre-arranged positions on the mother-ship. The migration was to start now. Those tarians not on guard duty took up the positions and connected and tuned into the body energy vibration. Once they connected, the elders took control and raised the frequency. Guards in the towers now sighted the advancing reptilian army. They sounded a cow-horn alarm and the guards this side of the mother-ship launched the sap grenades.

The guard had returned to the mother-ship. At the perimeter the vessel was unguarded. A group of elders concentrated on the vortex while the others continued to raise the frequency of the one vibration required to launch and move the mother-ship. To open the vortex though, it first had to be located. The easy part was to open the vortex once they anchored a suitable one. Thousands of vortexes existed, so temporary doorways could be created.

During the search the elders carried out on a different level of consciousness, to find a vortex which had the required characteristics of width, length and position; they were to send out a call to the vortex itself and hoped to receive a signal back which showed the one to use. The elders chose the right vortex at last and the doorway opened. Those from the perimeter guard who had returned to the mother-ship, but had not been part of the connection for the energy vibration flow;

had the perk of observing this spectacle.

At first a growing line mid-air above the mother-ship dome appeared. The line contained every colour of a rainbow. As this line grew in length, it split in the centre. Once the line had reached a length to accommodate the mother-ship in diameter, a rumbling thunder filled the sky as the line's central split widened; making room for the hole to come into existence. The hole grew until it had reached the line's edges.

As the tiarians watched, they could look into this amazing hole or vortex entrance. Through the hole the vortex tunnel walls, covered in a mixture of orange, pink, purple and red colours, could be seen to turn in both clockwise and anti-clockwise directions. Now the point of no return had arrived as the mother-ship lifted upwards towards the vortex doorway.

## Chapter 23

With heads held high, roaring undecipherable chants of war and yielding primitive hand-held weapons; the rows upon rows of reptilian soldiers stamped forward towards the reported location of the human survivors. Although now advancing as one army movement, conquering ground was at a slow rate, due to each soldier stamping along in time with the collective war chant. But they moved without pause and with one aim – human flesh which was the trophy.

The reptilian operators on top of the stone vehicles formed the rear of the marching troop convoy. For this battle they disengaged the spring coils, and instead each vehicle had a pair of reptilian soldiers pushing from the rear and pulled at the front by others.

Although he gave the original order to march, Larsst could not be out on the ground with his troops for this battle. Business of higher priority required his presence elsewhere, so the massacre of the human survivors was to be supervised by the Troop Masters. Well a small group of humans may be kept and first bred as slaves; and as part of a later dinner menu.

Many of the reptilian soldiers had not been above ground for long periods, and so while they showed obedience and followed orders; they had no time in which to get accustomed to the open air environment. The different climate conditions and terrain might be new to them and present obstacles which they had to overcome.

Long before the first reptilians reached the tianian mother-ship, they saw the dome from afar. Due to the loud war chanting, the rows of troops did not catch the sound of the small leafed projectiles flying through the air which now descended upon them. Most of these sap grenades hit the intended targets spot on as the soldiers within the rows marched shoulder to shoulder. Many soldiers fell as the sap poured over nostrils and mouths, with the air intake blocked.

Although becoming more confident and filled with adrenalin as they came closer to the mother-ship, the reptilians underestimated the human defence measures. As the troops marched, they looked ahead and not at their taloned feet which stomped earth flat. And as a result most of the remaining first row of soldiers fell and suffered leg wounds as they landed in the deep trenches. With no consideration for injured comrades, the rows of troops behind pushed forward; walking over the injured reptilians.

And the combat soldiers neither looked up at the sky, nor considered making a quiet advance. So at first the troops did not notice the rainbow coloured line spread across the sky above the mother-ship dome. Even as the line split to create the vortex doorway, the reptilians did not deter from the orders received. The ground beneath the heavy scaled feet shook. The trembling was strong enough for even the reptilians to realise that the cause was not the stomping march.

In confusion and without an order being given, the first row, and those behind came to an immediate stop. Although the rows to the rear at first had not been aware of the cause of the shaking, they soon did to as the mother-ship ascended. Troop Masters, who realised that the intended target now made an escape from the planet, shouted orders to attack and whipped the soldiers into motion.

But as the reptilian soldiers increased the marching pace, prompted by the kill instinct, the high inter-twined rows of bramble laid as a defence measure by the tiarans; prevented further movement forwards. By the time the first soldiers cut through the bramble, the mother-ship's basin was fifty metres above them; and the top of the vessel's dome entering through the vortex entrance. Although they did not reach their target, the reptilian army considered the event as a full success. They had forced the humans to leave. Earth's surface was now under reptilian command and control.

## Chapter 24

As the mother-ship rose, and the dome entered the vortex, the tiarian guards on board saw through the sealant dome wall the advancing reptilian army. The guards hoped that the vessel of perennials migrated as planned. And still did not believe that this mother-ship was in motion, being controlled by a crew of hundreds of tiarians; without even a cockpit.

They first watched the ground and later planet Earth disappearing in the distance. Once the mother-ship ascended into the vortex, the doorway closed behind them. In the vortex, the mother-ship moved in the tunnel direction. Now they had left planet Earth the law of gravity no longer applied. No sound came from outside in the vortex. The guards, still conscious, watched as the different colours of the vortex walls moved in different directions.

The mother-ship followed the vortex tunnel at an average speed which, without a deck with controls and dials, was difficult to measure. They assumed though that it should move much faster. Turbulence did not exist in the vortex and the mother-ship sailed along even though no wind power was available. After another sixty minutes, although not sure at first, the guards felt that the mother-ship had stopped mid-vortex.

The vortex wall colours stopped moving. The guards panicked and discussed what action to take. If they woke anyone and broke the connection network it might have fatal consequences for everyone on board. If they did nothing, everything depended on how long the others could stay concentrated on the connection and energy flow. A guard looking at the vortex tunnel wall, considered possible solutions, as did his colleagues. As he looked through the sealant dome, he saw a figure's reflection.

Shocked but curious, the man turned and found that he faced either a ghost or hologram. The masculine figure wore a silver hooded robe and hovered at twenty centimetres above the floor. He guessed that the figure, of an average-built man, looked the age of fifty years old. Before the guard could speak, a feminine figure appeared; again in a silver robe and the same age as the masculine figure. Soon those guards conscious circled the pair of figures. One guard asked the uninvited visitors on what business caused them to appear.

The masculine figure said "This ship is in breach of the Galactic



Transportation law. We need to speak with the vessel's Captain!"

The leader of the guard team came forward and explained "We're survivors of the planet Earth. We left while under attack from a reptilian force. At present apart from our guard team, crew members or tiarians as we are now named; are connected on a higher level of consciousness and as one have full control of our mother-ship."

The figures looked at each other and began with closed eyes to stand still for a few seconds.

With eyes now open again, the feminine figure looked at them and said "We have now suspended this ship. You can now wake the personnel without risk. We will return in one hour, by which time we hope you have briefed those of superior position; and representatives are ready to attend the galactic court - the future of the tiarians' journey depends on it!"

The guards first woke Mulrog and told him what happened. Mulrog then woke the elders, Jessica, Leo, Thorn and True. The guards continued to wake everyone else, so they could rest, eat and drink. Mulrog explained first to the elders what the guards had reported. An elder gave a nod of the head in acknowledgement and asked Mulrog to translate for the others.

After listening to what the elder said, Mulrog relayed the message to rest of the group "The elder explained they forgot one important thing which was the Galactic Board. With no direct contact, the elders still had heard of them. Inter-galactic vortex travel has to be registered and cleared by them. As planet Earth is not yet a member of the galactic network, due to the conscious ascension of the human race to the next dimension not being reached yet; there was no registration for this migration. As they control the status-quo within our galaxy, the Board has to listen to our case and decide if we be allowed to continue to Mars."

Puzzled, Thorn asked "Galactic Board? Who are the other member planets? What other life forms are in existence? And what if we're not allowed to continue with the migration?"

Mulrog translated Thorn's reply for the elders, and translated the answer for him "As we have not qualified for membership, we do not have the answers you seek. It can be said that intelligent life forms exist on galaxy network member planets. If we may not pass, we will have to return to Earth."

Thorn understood. They now made use of the remaining time to eat

and drink. From being connected non-stop and having the higher-frequency energy flow through them, they suffered from fatigue. Just as quick as the first figures had appeared and disappeared, a group of ten others had now arrived.

A visitor asked “Who is the Commander of this ship?” and looked at the elders and asked the same question in forest folk language.

The elders received an instruction that five from the mother-ship shall be permitted to appear before the Board; to explain their defence case and plea for permission to continue to the intended destination. Mulrog translated that Jessica, Mulrog, Thorn and True had to go with an elder. Mulrog to go as translator, and the others as they saw the virus outbreak; decay of the World Administration dome network and coordinated reptilian attacks.

Each had a pair of visiting figures as escorts. The figures held onto the tiarians they were escorting, who faded until they matched the same faint material substance as the visitors. Once the five had gone through this change and was ready to leave, they disappeared together with the escorts.

## Chapter 25

Somewhere in the centre of Earth's galaxy, was a mega-ship which served as the Galactic Board Headquarters. This ship was so enormous that it had an orbit which kept it in position. Although not round shaped, the ship had the mass of a small planet. Due to the dimension this vessel was in, it could not be reached by direct approach via the third dimension. Colonies from the galactic network member planets lived on the mega-ship and served the Board, to keep peace throughout the galaxy. This vessel's form was not symmetrical.

Cities, industrial plants, security towers and other structures grew up from the core hull. The mega-ship resembled a star shape – but a rough one at that. Escorts accompanied visitors everywhere, having collected them upon first arrival at the reception zone in the main ship hull. From that location they got shown to the sleeping quarters. When the five tiarans arrived though, security guards stood waiting. The escorts helped them to materialise at a three dimensional level.

Each of the five got their own suite, furnished with bed, tables, chairs and sofas. Most of the furniture was of a light pink colour. Every room had one window which gave view over the cities. These suites served as prison cells too, and without a pass card exit from the room was impossible. Though they found the hosts to be most hospitable, with a continual supply of Earth fruit and refreshments being served.

Thorn hoped that the Board possessed the same sense of time as humans did. Jessica reckoned that they must have been in the cells on board the mega-ship now for seven days. She spent the time remembering the order of events before the migration and noting key points which she might use in her explanation if asked by the Board.

A few days later guards collected the five from the cells and escorted the accused through a labyrinth of long walkways, up into one of the colossal cities; whereupon an elevator took them up to a circular platform. The platform deck was an open space without furniture or perimeter wall. So it was not obvious at first that this platform may be used for the Galaxy Board trial. The five stood alone in the middle of the platform. Fortunate for them no wind accessed the platform, and the temperature stayed at a comfortable level.

Jessica told True “I hope we don't have to wait another week stuck in this place!”

But before True answered, huge lights came to life and shot beams towards the five on the platform. So bright was the light that eyes needed to be covered with cupped hands. Parts of the floor opened with no noise and a semi-circle shaped blue table and bank appeared up through platform. Each piece of furniture had sharp edges. Once surfaced, the furniture locked in place. As the five looked around themselves at the furniture, one-by-one a Board member appeared on the bank. These members represented various alien species, and the human tarians took a strange interest in the different, somewhat frightening, faces of the Board members.

One member's head resembled a cow's, except that this face was flat and the nasal form more human. Another resembled a cockerel and even had a beak. Once the ten Board members had seated, five on each bank; the hearing begun. Board members wore turquoise robes and when one spoke so did the rest as one voice.

The voice announced "You three humans are to represent the human race at this hearing of the charges against your race. And together with you the pair of forest folk, are to answer for violating galactic transportation laws."

The humans on trial looked at each other puzzled as none of them knew which charges against the human race.

The voice continued "We have been monitoring planet Earth ever since the World Administration split the human race by force. We know that corruption and personal greed controlled the dome network constructed by the World, with no respect for the rest of mankind. The human race has ruled planet Earth for the last few hundred thousand years – this did not happen by accident nor by the humans being a master race. Explain to us the reason for the split and why it was not possible to repair the damage done to mankind as one race?"

True addressed the Board "Well you have now met three humans who didn't agree with what had happened. Thousands of families got separated, and many people died because of the forced split of our race. The World Administration was such a powerful and large global network that a chance of defeat from anyone within or outside that network wasn't possible."

Her brother Thorn added "I can imagine that the World Administration broke many old Earth, and galactic laws. But we're not aware of them, and so couldn't have prevented the intended actions. The recent circumstances which led to the collapse of the World

Administration is to say at the least macabre and not of our known world. We and those aboard the mother-ship are Earth survivors and believe in many races existing together on one planet. We've joined the forest folk as one civilisation, existing together alongside nature itself.”

The Board listened as Jessica explained how life was within the dome network. And how the World Administration controlled everyone, which made any form of uproar; expression of opinion or resistance impossible.

The voice spoke in unison “Before the human race ruled planet Earth, many long wars between them and the reptilian race took place. It was our Board who intervened. The human race needed to evolve and still need to continue doing so before joining our galactic network is possible. An agreement reached by both the humans and reptilians, sealed in a contract drafted by us. In the contract it states that for one million years, the human race were to rule Earth above ground; and until that period expired the reptilian race were to live underground. A condition in the contract was that humans stay as one race.”

The voice continued “With the contract violated, the reptilian race no longer remained under oath. And we understand that the rise began during the last few days as a direct result. The Board will announce a punishment for the human race today.”

True snapped in anger at the Board members “You haven't received the correct information! The reptilians didn't rise because of our alleged breach of contract. The reptilians developed a wrist chip virus to trigger the collapse of the World Administration network empire. We saw when they raided the network domes and butchered hundreds of innocent humans, chopped into pieces and thrown in sacks.”

Silence swept the platform as the Board members discussed the case on a telepathic level. The voice said “Now we heard what you had to say, we now call the reptilian representative.”

The five looked towards where the sounds of clumsy, dragging, footsteps came. Jessica, Thorn and True couldn't believe what they saw, as the reptilian entered and now stood one metre away from them.

The reptilian announced “Larsst, at the Board's service.”

Before the Board continued the questioning, Thorn interrupted and pointing a forefinger at Larsst said “You! You! What an audacity – murderer!”

Looking at the Board members, True continued “He was at the

dome attack, giving orders. He had spoken with us too and mentioned the virus. You should arrest him now.”

Now even louder, the voice spoke the command “Silence!”

Larsst sniggered to himself and allowed his forked tongue to glide along his scaled lips and collect the saliva, which drooled as soon the human scent reached his nostrils.

The voice addressed the reptilian “The Board thanks Larsst for offering help in this matter and appear as a witness. Please start with your account of events.”

Larsst took a confident step forward and began with “It must be understood that I was approached by the human World Administration. They wanted wrist chips produced in large quantities. It was humans who decided to split the entire race. That is when the contract was breached. The reptilian species found ourselves within our galactic rights to rise and take back the surface of the planet. Remaining underground for thousands of years, we were at a large disadvantage against the humans. We could not evolve our technology at the speed they did. So the virus was developed as a weapon to enable us to make a tactical military move and improve our chances of success.”

Larsst now looked at the five on trial and continued “For killing humans, I am sorry. But you must understand that we are a hunter species and we eat human flesh. For us this is natural and not 'Murder' which you say. It is nothing personal - do you humans murder what is served on dishes for you to eat?”

The voice asked Larsst “Do you agree that the human race have sacrificed enough for the breach of contract?”

Larsst gave his reply “Our race gained from the humans' breach of contract as we had a chance to rise above ground. Yes I agree with them. It might be an adequate consequence if they are permitted to continue with the migration. To have them sign another contract today that states that the human race is not to return to planet Earth for one million years. The same previous contract to which our species adhered; and remained underground.”

“Thank you. We will now retire to reach a verdict.” The voice confirmed.

With that the Board member figures disappeared. To discuss the case, they retired to a location unknown to those on trial or Larsst. During the Board's absence, silence ruled at first until the elder spoke

to Mulrog, and he translated for the other three.

“The elder said that he noticed that you recognised the reptilian and asks how you came to know him?” Said Mulrog.

Thorn explained to Mulrog how he had rescued Jessica and True from the elevator capsules. How they fought through the attacking reptilians and escaped from the dome. He mentioned how Larsst had been present, commanding his soldiers and had spoken to them mentioning the virus. But apart from that occasion, they had had no dealings with him. Mulrog translated for the elder. Those on trial and Larsst too received refreshments. For the elder and Mulrog a variety of plants and fruit. For the humans cooked meats and salad, and for Larsst a dish of organs – the species of the involuntary donors were not be disclosed. But judging from how Larsst devoured the blood-soaked snack, with so much lust; they knew that his menu content was of human origin.

Suddenly the Board members re-appeared, taking to the seats once again. Out of respect Larsst and the tiarians gave the Board their full attention.

The Board members now looked upon the tiarians and spoke together as the voice “The Board has now reached a verdict which we will now announce.”

After five minutes of silence the voice continued “The Board finds the whole human race on Earth guilty of being in breach of contract. We have considered the evidence, from the humans' side and of the reptilians. Those on board the tiarian mother-ship may continue the migration to the planet Mars. Effective from now, the reptilians have legitimate entitlement to live on the Earth's surface. But for them the same rule counts as for the humans before - they have to live as one race”.

Should the reptilian race split or breach the contract in any other form; the human race may be freed from the one million year ban. Those migrating and generations of offspring, are to stay on Mars. Those humans still on Earth are to live underground. Reptilians are to enforce this contract condition. If you tiarians on Mars ascend as a race, in awareness and consciousness, and qualify for galactic network membership; you may appeal against this rule.”

A square hole appeared in the floor and a column elevated up through it. On top of the twenty centimetre wide square column was a paper contract, pot of black ink and a grey feather quill. Those on trial

had reached an agreement and Thorn approached the column. But only after long hesitation did he sign the contract – one which only one person had ever signed before, one million years ago.

Within seconds after Thorn placed ink on paper, the five found themselves back on the mother-ship. The escorts ensured that the five materialised without bodily damage and disappeared afterwards. The migration now set forth. Time could be spared later to share with the other tiarians news of the trial and verdict, once the migration was complete. But first the journey was to continue. Without further delay, the tiarians on board manned the pre-arranged positions, established the raised energy vibration; and concentrated on the propulsion of the mother-ship. The rest of the journey through the vortex tunnel passed without incident.



## Chapter 26

High in the red sky of Mars, as before with the vortex entrance in the blue Earth sky, an exit for the vortex tunnel opened. As the mother-ship entered the Mars atmosphere, loud screeching noises could be heard on board; as the outer pressure and heat exercised physical power on the colossal extra-terrestrial ship. The sealant held out well against the elements.

As a result, the basin and dome received dents everywhere but did not crack. On board the mother-ship the tiarians having reached a higher level of consciousness, remained in that state. The mother-ship began a slow descent from five thousand metres. The crew of the mother-ship navigated via remote viewing, which was possible while in the current state; to a bare and level piece of land surrounded by a 'U' shaped mountain range. Upon completion of the descent, the landing caused an enormous haze of red dust to be created below and around the mother-ship; blocking the solar rays for a short time.

As the bottom of the mother-ship's basin touched the rocky ground, rocks beneath it crushed under the immense weight. Now that the mother-ship landed for good, a new martian city came into existence. With the tiarians now awake, the interest in the martian surroundings suppressed the heavy fatigue. As they peered out through the sealant dome wall, the crew looked at the red mountain range and orange sky.

Loud cheers echoed throughout the inside of the dome – they had survived reptilian attacks, a virus outbreak and a migration first thought impossible. And a vision of a small group of humans had made this venture possible. An event to become a historical classic, read to thousands of generations to come. One day in the far far future, humans might be allowed to return to the planet Earth; but after the current galactic contract expired.

A tiarian civilisation now needed to be nurtured. The 'Root Team' as Thorn called them, worked at the lowest level of the mother-ship and up to the waists in water. Before the migration begun they had numbered the bung handles. Each handle numbered so that each day a bung could be pulled, ensuring that a hole in a different part of the basin floor opened. By this method the main basin water distribution was at the same speed.

The forest itself, together with the inner side of the dome ensured another supply of water from condensation. Now bung number one left

the hole it had sealed, a metal spear made by the old breed blacksmith; made a cavity in the martian earth for a tree root to enter. Afterwards they placed the tree root in position. For the survival of the tiarians they hoped that the plan worked and that the martian surface soon became habitable.

Over a longer period the roots below the basin may join up again. During the first evening on Mars, at a gathering of the tiarians, they explained the galactic hearing and conditions of the signed contract. One of those in attendance asked Thorn a question which most others might have asked. They wanted to learn what was to happen to the humans left on Earth.

With his reply compiled Thorn said “We can now just speculate. We notified the other forest folk and old breed communities via pigeon. I hope they'll follow the instructions we provided and in due course arrive on Mars. As for the newer breed, well I imagine they'll convert by force and dwell within the old underground reptilian network. Those that stay above ground are at the mercy of the reptilians, which many of us saw before as not being favourable towards humans. Unless they sent a signal or travel to this planet, we'll never know; because for the next one million years a return to Earth means dire consequences for the tiarian race.”

As discussed before the migration launch, over the next days and weeks, the crew attended to the fresh planted foliage, plants, trees and vegetables. The elders spent much time in constant communication with the trees within the mother-ship dome. They relayed to Mulrog for translation, how the roots took to the martian earth; and if the earth itself changed and provided live-able conditions for the roots. Mulrog was pleased to give positive news with every update. With the preliminary work completed, and a proven success, the tiarians formed and organise trade groups. Jessica and True had been so pleased that members of the forest folk joined the medical group they had founded.

Everyone in this group had much knowledge to exchange. And had the challenge of finding remedies for any outbreak of martian illnesses. Leo launched a defence group and again, members of the forest folk guard joined. Although they did not expect an attack from outside, it was always better to be on the safer side and be prepared and alert. Groups for biology, gardening, hunting, language and literature, metalwork, physics, woodwork, and other subjects continued to be added to the list. Relt had opted for a different

profession and joined the gardening group.

Thorn formed a general workshop so projects may be worked on, which involved working with one or more of the other groups to find solutions. It was Mulrog who founded the language and literature group. He was glad that both adults and children took part, and in particular in the forest folk's language classes. As a fun project members of this group, having collected feedback from the rest of the tiarians; worked on a tiarian language which was a mixture of English and forest folk languages.

As for the elders, they enjoyed visiting the various groups and trying the various trade skills. Though they spent much of the time at the education classes for the tiarian children. Everything went according to plan. But could the tiarians live in harmony and peace for the next one million years? That is another story!

### **About the Author:**

Kirtaime grew up in the country outskirts of Bristol. After his military career he settled with his family in Germany. Wanting to write fantasy-fiction books was a childhood dream which he only decided to make come true in 2013 with his first book 'The Perennial Migration'.

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